

FAITH TO FAITH: SPIRITUAL DIRECTION
WITH A MULTIFAITH CONTEXT

By

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ABSTRACT

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This demonstration project addresses the topic of spiritual direction, which is the process of one individual accompanying another on her or his spiritual journey, with the objective to establish, deepen or maintain the individual's relationship with God, a higher power, an inner or infinite source or the laws of the universe.

In the traditional sense, director and directee have been adherents of the same faith tradition: Jewish to Jewish; Christian to Christian; Muslim to Muslim, and Buddhist to Buddhist. In this project the spiritual director, who is a Muslim woman, set out to determine the effectiveness of a Muslim spiritual director who offers and provides spiritual direction services to directees from four different faith traditions--namely, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism.

The site project was arranged with the One Spirit Interfaith Seminary (OSIS), which has, amongst its numerous programs, a two-year interfaith ministry program, and a two-year interspiritual spiritual direction program—both of which the interfaith minister and spiritual director of this project is a graduate. OSIS provides, as an option and an opportunity, spiritual direction sessions to the ministry students, from the students and graduates of its spiritual direction program.

Seven directees (volunteer subjects) participated in the project—four from the OSIS interfaith ministry program; one graduate from OSIS, and two with no affiliation to OSIS: one Jewish, three Christians; one Muslim, one Buddhist and another from a

Christian beginning who considers herself Interspiritual—one who borrows and practices from several or numerous traditions.

The project was arranged for six months, each directee participated in a fifty-minute session once per month. At the conclusion of the six-month process, each directee completed an evaluation form for the New York Theological Seminary's D. Min project and also submitted a statement to OSIS to provide feedback regarding the outcome of the .spiritual direction sessions. Based upon ongoing feedback in the sessions but, more importantly, from the completed evaluations and statements, the process was, for the most part, successful. A Muslim spiritual director effectively provided spiritual direction services across faith traditions.

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To my late mother, Estelle Griffin Booker whose loving prayers have sustained me, and who taught me many things, one of which is to have faith, and to my late maternal grandmother, Isabel Long Griffin Ballard who lay her healing hand upon me, and also gave me a dream to remember.

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INTRODUCTION

This demonstration project for New York Theological Seminary's (NYTS) doctoral degree in multifaith ministry concerns the subject matter of interfaith, interspiritual and multifaith spiritual direction. Spiritual direction, also referred to as spiritual coaching, spiritual companionship, spiritual counseling and spiritual guidance, is a discipline and ministry that offers and provides its seekers a safe environment where they can be heard and where such seekers can be assisted in the development, and maintenance of their spiritual lives—at an optimal level, with balance, centeredness, clarity and healthfulness.

Spiritual direction sessions take place between a spiritual director and a directee or a group of directees. Spiritual direction is an ancient practice. Traditionally, it has been between people who are of the same faith community. It need not be so, however, for spiritual direction can take place in an interfaith or multifaith setting. A group session may unfold between a director of one religious belief and directees of various beliefs.

A spiritual director who practices in the interfaith or multifaith mode may service clients from two or more faith traditions. If the director also provides services to directees who consider themselves interspiritual, he or she may be servicing individuals who may or may not have any particular faith tradition; persons who borrow from various faith traditions; those who believe in God but not organized religion; others who question the existence of God or do not believe in God, yet want to incorporate a spiritual practice in their lives. Wayne Teasdale describes the age we are entering as the 'Interspiritual Age' "where people are no longer isolated within their home tradition but are exploring

other traditions, finding what is useful to their own growth.”¹ Teasdale also defines interspirituality more specifically as “The common heritage of humankind’s spiritual wisdom: The sharing of mystical resources across traditions.”²

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IS

Spiritual Directors International (SDI), which began in 1989, is an organization that describes itself as “a global learning community of people from many faiths and many nations.” Liz Budd Ellmann, the Executive Director of SDI, offers a definition of spiritual direction. She writes:

Spiritual direction is the process of accompanying people on a spiritual journey. Spiritual direction exists in a context that emphasizes growing closer to God (or the holy or a higher power).³

If ten different spiritual directors are asked, “what is spiritual direction?” each one may arrive at a different definition, description or explanation. Such was discovered in the workshop offerings in the bulletin of Elizabeth Seaton Women’s Center. Of the seven spiritual directors listed, each one had either a slightly or very different answer. Ellmann goes on to say,

Spiritual direction has emerged in many contexts using language specific to particular cultural and spiritual traditions. It is easier to describe what spiritual direction does than what spiritual direction is.⁴

¹ Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World’s Religions* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999), 268.

² Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart*, 268.

³ Liz Ellmann, Executive Director, Spiritual Directors International, http://www.sdiworld.org/what_is_spiritual_direction2.html (accessed December 8, 2009).

⁴ Ibid.

In a half hour telephone conversation that I had with Liz Ellmann back in October, 2008, she shared with me that: Spiritual direction is compassionate listening. The difference between spiritual direction and pastoral counseling or care is subject to interpretation and depends on the faith tradition. Pastoral counseling or care involves the therapeutic model—dealing with problems to be fixed. Spiritual direction is integrating the self spiritually and, ultimately, holistically. Spiritual direction is God, for God, about God—relationship with the Holy and a spiritual life. With the Buddhist, the teacher is the spiritual director and obedience is required; with the Muslim, it is the Shaykh, not necessarily the imam, who is the teacher and also overseer of the mosque; in Judaism, it is the matriah, not necessarily the rabbi, who is the teacher and overseer of the synagogue. The term, “spiritual direction,” is an English term. Before the last 100 years, spiritual direction used to be confined to the priestly class in each or most faith traditions, people such as priests, monks and mullahs. In the Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, God *is* the Spiritual Director!

In spiritual direction training, one of the very first things taught is that there are three in the session: God, the director and the directee or group. Two Quranic references support what Ellmann said about the Abrahamic traditions and also what is taught to the aspiring spiritual director.

The Guidance of God—that is the only Guidance (Quran 2:120)

Witness how all affairs incline towards God (Quran 22:41)

Through the study of spiritual direction, it has often been said, “everything in life is spiritual and everything spiritual is life.” That seems fairly reasonable. If not totally clear to all involved, it rings with some element of truth or it, at least, makes some sense.

Jeanette A. Bakke, Ph.D., D. Min., a professor and spiritual director, helps to clarify the term, she opines that:

Spiritual direction is a spiritual discipline...it helps us to hear, see and respond to God. It is most often practiced in the context of a relationship between two people. However, spiritual direction conversations can also take place in groups...I have chosen to use the term *spiritual direction* because a vast body of literature can be explored most easily by using this term rather than any other...Spiritual direction is a kind of discernment about discernment. We explore what has seemed more and less important to us and how we are making choices and acting on our observations. We pay attention to how we interpret our experiences, thoughts and feelings associated with God and how that relationship influences our human relationships.⁵

In this demonstration project, it was discovered that no matter the directee's faith tradition or lack thereof, what was common among those of different practices were their concerns and the awareness or lack of awareness as to how they were reacting to them. Their major concerns were: relationships—spousal, offspring, parents, siblings, friends and co-workers; employment issues and interpersonal situations on the job; financial problems; health matters; loneliness. Bakke's point is well taken.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IS NOT

Spiritual direction is not psychiatry, psychology, psychoanalysis or pastoral care/counseling. A directee or client may see a mental health-care professional while seeing a spiritual director. In her ministerial training manual, Rev. Diane Berke, Ph.D., Spiritual Director of One Spirit Interfaith Seminary (OSIS) teaches:

Spiritual counseling is not in-depth psychotherapy. Spiritual counselors need the honesty and humility to recognize and admit when a client's emotional, psychological or psychiatric differences are beyond the scope of their own skills and clinical training. The willingness to seek super-

⁵Jeanette A. Bakke, *Holy Invitations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 18.

vision and to refer such clients to their appropriate sources of help is essential to being responsible as a spiritual counselor.⁶

The spiritual director is not to have any hidden agenda to convert a directee to his or her faith tradition or spiritual practices, and is not to force any of his or her beliefs, morals, thoughts or values on the directee. Berke continues:

Spiritual counseling is not about the counselor imposing his/her own belief system, spiritual perspectives or practices on the client, but to help the client discover what s/he experiences as meaningful and helpful.⁷

The name or term “spiritual direction” may lead some to assume that the spiritual director gives directions or provides answers. Others are uncomfortable with the terminology and feel more comfortable giving this ministry other names. According to Marion Cowan:

Spiritual direction is a time-honored term for a conversation, ordinarily between two persons, in which one person consults another, more spiritually experienced person about the ways in which God may be touching her or his life, directly or indirectly...many people dislike the term ‘spiritual direction’ because it sounds like one person giving directions or orders, to another. They prefer “spiritual companionship,” ending the holy or some other nomenclature.⁸

Whatever it is called, it is important to remember that everything concerning spiritual direction has to be placed in its proper perspective, and it behooves every spiritual director to be ever cognizant of the language that is used from client to client, especially in the face of a different faith tradition or no faith tradition—whether it is theistic or non-theistic.

⁶ Diane Berke, *Interfaith Minister's Training Manual: Second Year Training Program For Interfaith Ministers* (New York: One Spirit Interfaith Seminary, 1999, 2003), 127.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Marion Cowan, CSI, http://www.sdiworld.org/what_is-spiritual-direction2.html (accessed November 4, 2009).

WHO IS A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR?

If Spiritual direction is the process of accompanying people on a spiritual journey, the spiritual director is an accompanier—acting in the capacity of coach, counselor or guide, as well as discerner and witness. It is neither the role nor the responsibility of the spiritual director to give directives or coerce. Referring again to Bakke:

Present-day directors do not give answers or tell directees what to do in their relationship with God or when making life choices. Instead, they listen with directees for how the spirit of God is present and active. Directors support and encourage directees as they listen and respond to God.⁹

In addition, the spiritual director is one who offers a listening ear with compassionate, unconditional and non judgmental (agape) love. Her or his desire to assist and help others is not a license to fix others. In fact, a spiritual director is encouraged to remind her or himself that the role is to *serve others*.

WHAT DOES THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR BRING TO THE RELATIONSHIP AND THE SESSION?

Aside from training and ongoing studies, a spiritual director must adhere to his or her own spiritual practice and development. Three very important qualities, requirements and working tools to begin with are the desire to serve, unconditional, loving compassion and non-judgment.

Additional assets that the spiritual director can bring into the relationship with his or her clients are: the provision of a safe, comfortable, peaceful environment or space; orderliness, structure and flexibility; availability; presence; the opportunity to be heard and a sense of being listened to. The director may use mirroring or reflection to provide

⁹ Bakke, *Holy Invitations*, 19.

the directee the opportunity to listen to the content of his or her own words. Questioning may be utilized to assist the directee to delve deeper or for the spiritual director to seek clarity in what the directee is saying. The director may also suggest different exercises, such as journaling or deep breathing. Should a directee wish to pray, read or recite scripture or request a brief period of meditative silence, such are also available during a session.

TYPES AND MODELS OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Spiritual direction may be offered in various ways. In its age-old, traditional form that may be called intrafaith: Christian to Christian; Jew to Jew; Muslim to Muslim and Buddhist to Buddhist. If the spiritual director provides services across faith traditions, such as Christian to Jewish or Muslim to Buddhist, it would be considered interfaith spiritual direction. Should the director service a group of directees that consists of various faiths, it would be named multifaith spiritual direction. Interspiritual spiritual direction focuses less on religious doctrine and dogma and more on the mystical and spiritual aspects of life.

The investigator in this project is a Muslim—a devotee of the Islamic faith tradition, an ordained interfaith minister¹⁰ and also a certified interspiritual spiritual director. The volunteer subjects/directees involved consisted of one Jewish, three Christians, one Muslim, one Buddhist and one Interspiritual person—a total of seven. This investigator set out to examine and determine the effectiveness of a Muslim spiritual director who provides spiritual direction services across faith traditions.

¹⁰ Note: One Spirit Interfaith Seminary trains and ordains interfaith ministers and interspiritual directors.

The challenge statement: I am a Muslim woman, an interfaith minister and spiritual director whose services are available to Muslims and individuals of various religious and spiritual beliefs, who are looking to develop and deepen their relationship with God, the Universal Mind of Intelligence and Omnipotence, and their inner being. Spiritual direction outside of one's faith tradition can raise questions for the director and the directee. This demonstration project will explore how a Muslim spiritual director can be effective in a multifaith context.

The length of the project took place over a six-month period and was conducted, in part, via the site of One Spirit Interfaith Seminary (OSIS).

Three of the directees were first-year ministry students of OSIS, and one was a second-year student who has since graduated from the program and has become an ordained interfaith minister. Two of the first year students are from Christian backgrounds, but have interest in other faiths—one from a Catholic family and the other from a Presbyterian family with Assyrian and Middle Eastern roots. The third first-year student practices no faith tradition and considers herself Interspiritual. The second-year student is from a strict orthodox Jewish background, well read in Hebrew Scripture and is also interested in other faiths. One less recent graduate of OSIS is a Buddhist. The remaining two of the seven subjects are not associated with OSIS—one is an Apostolic Christian and the other a Muslim.

Sessions were scheduled once per month over the six-month period. Each session was timed for a fifty-minute contact hour. A majority of the sessions took place via telephone because some of the seminary students were distant learners residing in states outside of New York. Some of the sessions were face to face.

At the conclusion of the six-month project, volunteer directees were informed of their options to continue or discontinue spiritual direction sessions. Each volunteer also completed an evaluation questionnaire. In addition, each directee signed an informed consent for permission to use the information from their sessions, without the use of their names for the purpose of maintaining confidentiality and privacy (See Appendix A).

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE SITE

The demonstration project for Faith to Faith: Spiritual Direction with a Multifaith Context was arranged and carried out with the One Spirit Interfaith Seminary (OSIS)-One Spirit Learning Alliance (OSLA). OSIS opened its doors in 2002. It is located at 330 West Thirty-Eighth Street in New York City. It has a two-year interfaith ministry program, a two year interspiritual spiritual counseling program, and other courses such as Consciousness Studies, Integral Multifaith, and Conscious Leadership. Additional classes and workshops are available to the students and the public.

OSIS was co-founded by Rev. Diane Berke, Ph.D. and Rev. Michael Pergola, J.D. Rev. Joyce Liechenstein, Ph.D. is the associate director, and Rev. Susan Turchin is the registrar and a second-year dean. There is a board of directors, a staff of deans, instructors, and office management and operations personnel.

The courses at OSIS are offered to attending and distance learning students. Classes meet one weekend per month, and students are supported by their deans, mentors, study group members and, more recently since 2007, by spiritual counselors who are students and graduates of the interspiritual spiritual counseling program. Communications are ongoing via class pages on the website and conference calls.

Students who enroll in the programs at OSIS reside throughout the United States and there are some who are also from abroad—the United Kingdom is one such location.

Most of the participants are working individuals who benefit from the opportunity of the part-time programs offered at OSIS. The student population is made up of adults ranging, on average, from twenty to seventy years old. People of all races, national origin, ethnicity, gender, faith tradition and sexual orientation are welcome.

The students are matched up with a counselor, and a schedule is arranged for at least a six-month period. Counselors must also see their own spiritual counselors and supervisors, and documentation must be maintained for reporting purposes.

Through its training program in spiritual counseling, OSIS is continuing and passing down the traditions of the prophets, messengers, elders, shamen, and desert fathers and mothers of the world.

The investigator in this project, Faith to Faith: Spiritual Directions with a Multifaith Context, made arrangements with OSIS to join the program for the school year in order to participate in the spiritual counseling sessions that are offered to its students. Four seminary students were assigned—three first-year students and one second-year student who was preparing for graduation. The other three individuals, who agreed to be voluntary subjects (directees), were, one who graduated from OSIS and two others with no association to OSIS. In the first two months of the project, two subjects dropped out of the program, but another replacement stayed the course to completion. All of the other subjects fulfilled the six-month agreement, with the exception of one who missed one of the monthly sessions due to a personal matter.

The OSIS founding members, Diane Berke and Michael Pergola have been very encouraging and supportive, and two faculty and administrative members participated on my site team—Joyce Liechenstein and Susan Turchin. I am grateful to them and the

seminary students for making it possible for me to complete my project at OSIS as my demonstration site.

CHAPTER 2

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION: ITS BEGINNINGS, ITS HISTORY

The ministry of spiritual direction is not new, but it was not always named spiritual direction. Undoubtedly, some form of coaching, companionship, counseling or guidance existed amongst the elders in Africa, as well as other areas of the non-West, where there were religious traditions, oral histories, relics and cave drawings long before recorded history that could give us some clues or sense of what was taking place during ancient times. If we could but sit with an elder or griot, an oral historian, who has carried generations and centuries of information to help us decipher the stone carvings or decode the cave paintings. But as history goes, Ochs and Olitsky write:

Although we can find examples of spiritual guidance through the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, the first formal discussion of the practice occurs in the worship of the Christian Desert Fathers who lived in Egypt, Palestine, Arabia, and Persia in the fourth century of the Common Era.¹¹

Ochs and Olitsky go on to say more about the Desert Fathers, Catholics and Protestants of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the Jews and other faith traditions of the twentieth century, but there is no mention of the Marabout of Senegal and Ghana; the Yeleba (or Jelaba) of Guinea; the Yoruba Babalawos of Nigeria or the Shaman Grandmothers and Grandfathers of the Americas—North and South—all of whom have served as guides for centuries.

¹¹ Carol Ochs and Kerry M. Olitsky, *Jewish Spiritual Guidance: Finding Our Way to God* (New York: Jossy-Bass, 1997), 11.

In 1998, the Rev. N. Graham Standish, Ph.D., MSW, pastor of the Calvin Presbyterian Church in Zelienople, PA, USA, posed the questions, “How long has spiritual direction been a part of the Christian tradition? Was Jesus a spiritual director to his disciples? Did spiritual direction become a formal tradition much later?” He also says that “these questions are difficult to answer as the history of spiritual direction is not really clear.”¹²

Standish refers to Kenneth Leech, who in agreement with Ochs and Olitsky, believes that the first signs of a spiritual direction system in Christianity appeared in the fourth and fifth centuries with the Desert Fathers.”¹³

Standish goes on to say that the teachings that have been handed down over the centuries bear influence on how spiritual direction is practiced. The Desert Fathers shaped current perspectives and practices of the discipline, and people like Evagrius, John Cassian, Benedict, Gregory of Palamas, Bernard of Clairveaux, the writer of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Ignatius of Loyola and Brother Lawrence did as well. Most of these master teachers practiced a nondirective approach to spiritual direction.¹⁴ The nondirective approach that Standish speaks of indicates that the spiritual director does not tell the directee what to do. This was the case regarding the masters mentioned, but was the nondirective approach always the method used?

Rev. Joyce Liechenstein, Ph.D., Associate Director of One Spirit Interfaith Seminary and spiritual director mentions that: spiritual direction probably goes back to

¹² N. Graham Standish, “Directive Forms of Spiritual Direction: Methods and Merits,” *Presence: The Journal of Spiritual Directors International* 4, no 3 (September 1998), 6.

¹³ Standish, *Methods and Merits*, 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6, 7.

the beginning of time. Shamans were the spiritual helpers. Jesus was spiritual director par excellence. He used the nondirective approach. He invited, asked questions, challenged, and told stories. After that, spiritual directors became much more directive. The director was like a father or mother who gave instructions. He or she used prayer and example. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits changed the format. He saw spiritual direction as a process of asking questions and discerning—how God speaks to the heart; how God leads us. He recognized that it is only the directee, or the person who is coming for direction, who could answer these questions. The director doesn't really direct and rarely makes suggestions. The director helps the individual to arrive at his or her own truth and understanding of God's guidance in a particular situation. It was Ignatius who really made that shift in the Christian tradition.¹⁵

Based on the following statement, might Liechenstein and Standish be saying the same thing about Jesus but in different ways, i.e. Jesus directed by teaching—telling and showing how it's done versus telling what to do?

Ignatius or Saint Ignatius of fifteenth and sixteenth century Spain is known as the founder of the Jesuits and the writer of the *Spiritual Exercises*, which Dale Irvin, president of New York Theological Seminary (NYTS) describes "...as a guidebook to take one through a four-week spiritual retreat."¹⁶ Ignatius is also one of the many well-known examples in the discipline and ministry that eventually became known as spiritual direction. "The conversations that one is directed to undertake through the pages of these spiritual exercises are the ones that are to take place within the self. The exercises are

¹⁵ Joyce Liechenstein, "A Brief History of Spiritual Direction" (New York: One Spirit Interfaith Seminary, Professional Development Program, 2002-2003).

¹⁶ Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, Vol, 2, (Unpublished Manuscript), 101.

brought to a close with a brief list of recommendations that assists one to readjust to his or her return to ordinary life and also include directions for spiritual development sessions with a spiritual director.”¹⁷

The four-week or month-long retreat was designed to provide the disciple, monk or student a space for quiet learning and study, concentration, contemplation, focus, meditation, and periods of silence—for spiritual seeking and development, discernment, guidance and, ultimately, formation. Following the four-week retreat, the disciple or seeker is encouraged to continue his or her spiritual development; sessions with a spiritual director or guide are recommended. As a frame of reference, retreats for spiritual practice, development and formation, are also practices in the Islamic-Sufi tradition. Shaykh Jamal Rahman mentions that “Advanced Sufi aspirants undertake a ten-to-forty day retreat or chilla of silence under the supervision and guidance of a teacher.”¹⁸

For a time, non Catholics began studying with the Catholics and applying the practice. Until more recently, spiritual direction was practiced within a particular faith tradition, i.e. Christian to Christian, Jewish to Jewish or Muslim to Muslim. While such is still the case, the process has changed and is still evolving. Nowadays, it is not uncommon to experience or witness the crossing of traditions where a devotee of one faith may seek and accept the services of a spiritual director of a different faith. While it could be true that one may feel more at ease with a spiritual director of his or her own faith, the guidelines and principles are fundamentally the same for all spiritual directors.

¹⁷ Irvin and Sunquist, *World Christian Movement*, p?

¹⁸ Jamal Rahman, Kathleen Schmitt Elias and Ann Holmes Redding, *Out of Darkness into Light: Spiritual Guidance in the Quran with Reflections from Christian and Jewish Sources* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2009), 176.

Inasmuch as this demonstration project, “Faith to Faith: Spiritual Direction with a Multifaith Context,” was conducted by a Muslim investigator, who provided spiritual direction to seekers (directees) of the Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist and Interspiritual persuasions, it would certainly be logical and reasonable to shed light on the basics of each tradition as that which must be taken into consideration when sessions between director and directees are not exclusively intrafaith, but rather interfaith, multifaith or interspiritual.

Before addressing the more widely recognized traditions, the spiritual direction of people who existed before the Abrahamic traditions and Desert Fathers and Mothers deserve brief mention.

In the Yoruba system, the guide is often an elder or godparent who is highly respected for his or her knowledge. Correal says, “Yoruba culture is deeply reverent toward the elders. My godmother always told me that it takes twenty-five years of priesthood to really come into elderhood.” Correal goes on to say, “These elders will teach you a great deal...They remember how they learned by soaking up everything their elders did, said, intuited, and implied.”¹⁹

In John Phillip Neimark’s book, one of his colleagues writes that many different religions evolved in Africa that were nurtured by wise men and women like that of the Yoruba people for instance, who developed a hierarchical society and the complex religion of Ifa—a system of divination.²⁰ Incidentally, Philip John Neimark is a babalawo, a priest of Ifa, also known as Yoruba, Orisha and a number of the other names,

¹⁹ Tobe Malore Correal, *Finding Soul in the Path of Orisha: A West African Spiritual Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: The Crossing Press, 2003), 141-145.

²⁰ John Phillip Neimark, *The Way of the Orisha: Empowering Your Life through the Ancient African Religion of Ifa* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers. 1993), ix-x.

as it spread from Africa to other parts of the world. Neimark is also a Caucasian American. In the preface of his book, his teacher, Afoladi Epiga, a fifth-generation African babalawo, writes of Neimark:

Some wonder about the propriety of a white man participating at the highest level of a 'black religion.' They should not question this. Ifa is an African religion originating from Ile Ife in what is now the Nation of Nigeria. Oosanla, or Obatala as he is better known in the West, was white. Ifa teaches that people of all colors are born into the earth from Ile Ife.²¹

Neimark expressed that he had some issues and conflicted thinking concerning achievements and material acquisition and a spiritual life. He believed that he could not have both at the same time. It had to be one or the other. This conflicted thinking caused him more discomfort and pain than joy and satisfaction. He went to a reading or divination in Florida with his wife and some friends. Three babalawos did readings. The elder-most priest did his reading. One year later, most of what had been said in the reading came true. Part of his story reads that in 1974 he learned of Ifa, a thousand-of-years-old African religion that took root in the culture of the Yoruba Kingdom in what is now Nigeria. "It is the oldest monotheistic religion on earth." He contacted the western world's foremost authority on Ifa, Dr. William Bascom, professor of anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley and received confirmation of Ifa's legitimacy.²²

Most people do not think of Ifa or the Yoruba religion as a monotheistic religion, and especially not as the "oldest monotheistic religion on earth" because of its many gods and deities, but a Supreme God is mentioned. In the context of spiritual direction, especially interfaith and multifaith spiritual direction, it is important that the earth-

²¹ Neimark, *The Way of the Orisha*, xv.

²² *Ibid.*, 2-4.

centered faith traditions be examined more closely to get a better understanding of them, and also to recognize and include them in the subject matter of spiritual direction in general and interspiritual spiritual direction in particular.

A number of people who practice Christianity also practice or incorporate some form of Ifa into their Christian beliefs. Where the Cubans and Puerto Ricans incorporated the Orisha into the Catholic saints, other Caribbean and West Indian people incorporated the Orisha into the Protestant Baptist faith. Tobe Melora Correal, Yemaja priestess, makes reference to these groups, saying that as many as 75 million people worldwide practice some version of the tradition: Yoruba or Orisha (Nigeria and the United States, Cuba, syncretized with Catholicism), Yoruba-Lukumi (Afro-Cuban, non-syncretized), Condoble (Brazil) Shango Baptists (Trinidad and Tobago) and the Ifa priesthood (Nigeria and the Americas).²³ The Shango Baptists that Correal refers to are also known as Spiritual Baptists, Shouter Baptists or Tie-head Baptists.

Native American beliefs are amongst the earth-centered spiritual beliefs and practices of a people. From an article in the Inter-Tribal Times is a reference regarding the spirituality of the Indigenous People of North America: Native American beliefs are an overall part of their culture and way of life. They believe that everything is sacred, including the tallest mountain and the smallest plant. Lessons as well as purposes are found in all things and all experiences. Of utmost importance are honor, love and respect for the Creator, the earth and all living things because human is part of everything and vice versa—all one. Native Americans believe that their elders hold the answers and there is much to learn from them, therefore, their elders deserve the utmost respect.

²³ Correal, *A West African Spiritual Tradition*, 1.

These beliefs have created a common thread that weaves itself through all of the tribes or ethnic groups.²⁴ There is evidence of the acknowledgement and honor of a Supreme Being as well as honor and respect for the elders—the Grandmothers and Grandfathers who teach and guide. If that be so, there had to have been spiritual practices and guides along with or maybe even before the time of Hinduism.

Spiritual direction is not new, i.e. spiritual counseling or guidance is not by any means a recent phenomenon or practice. The process of studying and becoming a learned person who could then assume a leadership role and guide others to a more spiritually balanced life existed with the elders or godparents in Africa, the desert parents of the Middle East, the grandparents of North and South America, the gurus of India and many others around the world. What has existed since the creation of humankind and called by other names has evolved into what is now recognized as the discipline, ministry and practice of spiritual direction, to which many are only recently becoming aware of and involved in. Spiritual directors of many faiths are now stepping forward and offering their services to those who are seeking balance and meaning in their spiritual lives. They avail the services to constituents of their own traditions as well as to those of other faith traditions. Zari Weiss mentions that being pioneers in a new field requires living through a period of transition until spiritual direction becomes firmly established. The benefit “far outweighs the discomforts of awkwardness of the transition period in which we currently find ourselves.”²⁵

²⁴ *Inter-Tribal Times*, October 1994, <http://home.earthlink.net/~tessia/Native.html> (accessed December 11, 2009).

²⁵ Zari Weiss, *Tending the Holy: Spiritual Direction Across Traditions*, ed. Norvene Vest (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2003), 57.

In agreement with Liechenstein, “Spiritual direction probably goes back to the beginning of time.” As God, the Supreme Being and Universal Source of Intelligence spoke to each messenger, each messenger brought the message to the people, and the first adherents or converts assisted in taking the message to the masses. From that point onwards, some form of spiritual direction developed with each tradition.

JEWISH SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Judaism began about 3700 years ago in Canaan...Abraham is the father of the Hebrew people (Jews). God established His covenant with Moses.²⁶

The Jewish religion, Judaism, is known as the first of the Abrahamic religions, but it has not been known for its role in spiritual direction. In a journal article, “What to Expect in Jewish Spiritual Direction,” Jennifer Hoffmann gives a sense of what spiritual direction is as it pertains to Jewish spiritual direction: Spiritual direction is the process of sitting with another for the purpose of discerning God’s movement in your life and deepening your relationship with the Holy. Will the content of your sessions have to be Jewish? (No). How Jewish will the sessions have to be? (Only as Jewish, or not, as you want them to be). Do you have to be knowledgeable about Judaism to desire Jewish spiritual direction? (No). Is it possible that in your sessions you may bring material that is not Jewish at all? (Yes).

Hoffmann’s statement indicates that a directee need not be a devout Jew, and the session does not have to be strictly Jewish. She does, however, give some insight into specific, basic Jewish beliefs:

²⁶ Pravin K. Shah, *Essence of World Religions: Unity in Diversity* (Raleigh, NC: Federation of Jain Associations in North America, 2004), 46.

According to Hoffmann, spiritual direction is not new to Judaism, and there are references to spiritual companioning amongst the Jewish people from their earliest recorded history. However, it is not until 2001 that formal training programs for Jewish students began at the time the Lev Shomea (Listening Heart) training program was initiated. There are now six training programs and at least 130 spiritual directors.²⁷

Ochs and Olitsky mention that even though examples of spiritual guidance are found through the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, formal discussion of the practice occurred in the worship of the Christian Desert Fathers.²⁸ Nonetheless, Ochs and Olitsky also mention two gentlemen from the 1800's who obviously practiced as spiritual directors and provided sound guidance:

The Gerer Rebbe (1845 – 1905) stressed the importance of establishing one's relationship with God by telling his followers:

Let me be candid with you. You cannot depend on me to be an intermediary between God and you. I can merely attempt to point you the right paths in good conduct, leading to Godliness. But you must walk thereon without my aid. Learn to stand on your own feet, and even if your rebbe is not a great person, you will not fail.²⁹

The philosopher Martin Buber (1875 – 1965) taught that our human relationship should reflect the divine relationship we are trying to maintain.³⁰

Both gentlemen, Buber and the Rebbe, were indeed practicing spiritual direction, and the Rebbe even pointed out his own humanness as well as the fact that he, the guide,

²⁷ Jennifer (Jinks) Hoffmann, "What to Expect in Jewish Spiritual Direction" *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction* 13, no. (December 2007): 46, 48.

²⁸ Ochs and Olitsky, *Finding Our Way to God*, 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

was not *the* director but merely the companion that walks along beside the directee as he or she finds his or her own way on the path—the journey to God.

Ochs and Olitsky raise the importance of prayer as it relates to spiritual direction, saying that: “The central event in the spiritual life is prayer...Spiritual guides try to expand people’s concept of prayer so that it opens up to a relationship with God...What happens when a person prays?...Why do we pray? How do we pray? What is prayer for us?”

The directee can pray with the spiritual director if he or she chooses to. The director may, depending upon the tradition of the directee, ask about the directee’s prayer life or mention something about prayer as a way of deepening one’s relationship with the divine. This may be the case in any faith tradition where prayer is practiced. “Prayer is about relationship. It is a form of focusing, of paying attention, of intentionality.”³¹ This revisits the importance of the personal relationship with God—the relationship where the spiritual director can provide the service of assisting the directee to either establish, renew or maintain that connection.

Zari Weiss says of spiritual direction that it is a new and unexplored terrain for most Jews and, for those who are exploring, they are learning together as they go along.³² “More Jews are being trained as spiritual directors, and more and more are seeking direction from directors who may or may not be Jewish.”³³

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

³¹ Ochs and Olitsky, *Finding Our Way to God*, 31.

³² Zari Weiss, *Tending the Holy*, 22.

³³ *Ibid.*, 56.

Christianity began about 2,000 years ago in Canaan. Christianity is based on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth (Jesus Christ).³⁴

Although each faith tradition had, or must have had, its own built-in system of spiritual direction, it seems well established that “the first formal discussion of the practice occurs in the worship of the Christian Desert Fathers.” Hoffmann has stated that “Spiritual direction is not new in Judaism,” and Ochs and Olitsky claim that “we can find examples of spiritual guidance throughout the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures” Even though the practice may have existed before Christianity and, for that matter, before Judaism and other traditions before the Abrahamic religions, the Christians are believed to be the ones who formalized it and are recorded in the history of the discipline, ministry and practice as having done so.

Ignatius and others are well known as spiritual directors, and the Desert Fathers and Mothers before them are frequently referred to, but where did they, as Christians, receive their direction? The answer is obvious—Jesus, the Christ. Jesus directed his followers, and he directed the other. He practiced interfaith spiritual direction. Nicodemus was one of his followers, and the Samaritan woman at the well was another.

The Desert Guides, are referred to as Desert Fathers and Mothers and as Christian Desert Fathers. However they are referred to, some were Christian and others were of different spiritual practices. Ignatius would fall in line with the Christian lineage.

Ignatius or Saint Ignatius of Loyola, a fifteenth century personality, is one of the most popular persons associated with spiritual direction or Christian spiritual direction. When he became isolated during illness, he like the prophets and saints before him,

³⁴ Pravin K. Shah, *Unity in Diversity*, 56.

gravitated toward and retreated to a place in nature to ponder and think. Like Moses who went to the mountain, Muhammad who went to the cave and Buddha who sat under the Bothi Tree, Ignatius sat by the water—the Condoner River. Through his daydreams, a form of meditation, discerning and taking notes of his experiences, he developed the Spiritual Exercises. Many say that those Spiritual Exercises, done on retreat and combined with spiritual direction, lead to spiritual formation.

From Loyola, Spain to Paris, France, Ignatius roomed with Francis Xavier and Pierre Favre. As he was developing the Spiritual Exercises, the trio became “friends in the Lord,” developing into the Company of Jesus and the order founded by Ignatius known as the Jesuit Order.³⁵ Even though the Spiritual Exercises began with Ignatius, a Catholic priest, one need not belong to the Society of Jesus. One could even be a member of other religious communities.³⁶ The Spiritual Exercises were structured into a program of prayer that leads a person to inner freedom and an ever-deepening relationship with God that enables him or her to encounter God in all things. The Spiritual Exercises are divided into time segments: a preparation time, and four weeks of prayer.³⁷ One very important aspect of spiritual direction pointed out by Ignatius is that he “wants the director to let God deal directly with the retreatant,” an instruction that is given to present-day spiritual directors. The director’s work is “the ability of the director to discern the movement of the spirits both within the directee and with the self of the director.”³⁸

³⁵ Weiss, *Tending the Holy*, 64.

³⁶ Ibid., 61.

³⁷ Ibid., 64-65.

³⁸ Ibid., 65.

Zori Weiss speaks on the purpose of the Spiritual Exercises, saying in essence, that at the center of the Spiritual Exercises is learning how to discern the root of our desiring, tug of war of various urges, some for our good and some for our downfall, callings that come from different sources—God and not God, which are the enemy of our human nature [**the shadow**]. We can tell where our calling is coming from if we can tell where it is leading—closer to God or further away from divine love. We can be sure which spirit is behind the urges.³⁹ Thus, the Spiritual Exercises that were structured into a program of prayer, silence and other disciplines were developed to help the seeker find his or her way to the higher or true self.

Rather than the Spiritual Exercises, Jeanette Bakke uses the term Christian disciplines. There are disciplines in every faith tradition: prayer, fasting, alms giving, reading and studying sacred texts—also meditating, bowing and chanting. However, of a Christian discipline, Bakke states that

[a] A Christian discipline is any practice that helps us to listen to and follow God...we attempt to focus more attention on God and less on other things that crowd our hearts, minds, and lives by setting aside time and space just for God.⁴⁰

The Ignatian Spiritual Exercises started out as a form of Christian spiritual direction, but they can be adapted to other faith traditions. Each faith need only apply its disciplines of prayer, worship, Scripture and other practices with its own context.

In his article, “Directive Spiritual Direction,” and in light of Christian spiritual direction, N. Graham Standish, a Presbyterian pastor, refers to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises and Twelve Step programs. He says that we may need to form a more

³⁹ Weiss, *Tending the Holy*, 71.

⁴⁰ Bakke, *Holy Invitations*, 230-31.

balanced approach, sometimes offering a structured and directive program, while also remaining open and nondirective in one-to-one sessions. The Ignatian Spiritual Exercises offer a structured program that can be administered in an open and nondirective manner.

An example of the directive approach might be to give a directee an exercise to do—maybe a walking meditation. The nondirective approach would be questioning or reflecting.

The Twelve Step program also offers a structured program while providing a supportive environment that stresses the reliance on a higher power which some would call God. Movement through the Twelve Steps seems to closely mirror the transforming movement of *metanoia*—the Greek term for repentance and conversion in the Christian tradition.⁴¹

In reference to *metanoia* Carolyn Gratton says, “A central focus for spiritual guidance is the human heart’s desire to grow and change—to be converted again and again in the direction of its ultimate love. The Christian guide wants to help this *metanoia* happen.”⁴²

While the “Christian guide wants to help this *metanoia* to happen,” it is the desire, hope and intention of all spiritual directors and guides to assist in a type of *metanoia* happening within the self and with the directees. The spiritual director wants for the directees that which he or she wants for him or herself—transformation, change from old habits that no longer serve a purpose or are self destructive *and* transcendence,

⁴¹ N. Graham Standish, *Forms of Spiritual Direction*, 10.

⁴² Carolyn Gratton, *The Art of Spiritual Guidance* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 122.

to rise above the obstacles in the path and the temptations that, if given into, can cause destruction in relation to self and others.

ISLAMIC SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Islam was founded about 1,400 years ago in Arabia (by) Prophet Muhammad, early 7th Century.⁴³

Islamic spiritual guidance arises out of the revelations in the Quran as they were given to Prophet Muhammad, *Peace Be Upon Him* (PBUH) and the resulting message and practice that the Prophet brought to the people who became devotees of Islam, which means submission to God. This core directive, submission to God, is at the heart of Islamic spiritual direction. Every Muslim or believer declares that there is only one God. It is whispered in the ear of the newborn until he or she can say it. The core beliefs of a Muslim are that there is only one God and, ultimately, everything is the will of God.

Prophet Muhammad was the spiritual director “par excellence” to Muslims as was Jesus to the Christians—according to Rev. Liechenstein. Prophet Muhammad brought the message to his first wife Khadijah and, after her death, to his other wives—also to his companions. They became the guides, taking the message to others who ultimately became followers of Islam. It is the focus and intent of the Islamic guide to help the seeker remain on the path to God. The revelations, which became the Quran and the hadith, which is the sayings and actions of the Prophet, are used today by individual

⁴³ Pravin K. Shah, *Unity in Diversity*, 62.

Muslims who take responsibility for their spiritual lives, and by imams, shaykhs and by individuals who perform in the capacity of spiritual directors.

According to Shaykh Jamal Rahman, also known as Brother Jamal, a Muslim is expected to meet specific requirements: steadfastness in his or her religious—and personal relationship with God; a relationship with one’s Islamic community, and a relationship with one’s imam or Shaykh, who are guides and teachers. Sounding somewhat similar to the Spiritual Exercises, Rahman states, “The path of Islam requires abiding inner work, and the guidance of a spiritual teacher is crucial to the process.”⁴⁴ Another very important obligation that a Muslim is expected to live up to is his commitment to his or her spiritual life and taking responsibility for its development. The Prophet Muhammad said, “Every Muslim is his own priest.”⁴⁵

Brother Jamal points out that the spiritual guide may also be known as a Sufi, who can be of the Sunni or Shiite tradition. The Sunnis are those who chose to follow one of the companions of the Prophet’s who became successor after the Prophet’s death; the Shiites are those who chose to follow one of the Prophet’s cousins, Ali, who believed that the successor should come through the bloodline. He also prefers that the terms guide and seeker replace those of teacher and student, and he mentions that group or community spiritual direction holds real importance to one-to-one sessions. “The pattern of spiritual direction between guide and seeker consists of periodic one-on-one sessions coupled with weekly participation in a group gathering.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Jamal Rahman, “What to Expect in Islamic Spiritual Direction,” *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction* 13, no 2 (June 2007), 35.

⁴⁵ Rahman et al., *Into Light*, 36.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

If a Muslim is looking for an Islamic guide or a Sufi, it should be someone who has reasonable and sufficient knowledge in the fundamental principles of Islam as well as someone of good character. Brother Jamal lists four specific areas of knowledge: “Quran; sayings and actions of the Prophet (*Hadith*); insights of jurists and sages ((*sharia, law*); individual reasoning.”⁴⁷ The Quran is the first and most important source of guidance, because it is believed to contain information for a complete way of life. The Quran is the guide for the guide, and it is the guide for the guide to guide the seekers. “Brimming over with spiritual direction...The holy book (Quran) challenges each of us to become fully human and remain conscious of God.”⁴⁸

Not only are we sometimes mindless or inattentive to our spiritual lives when everything seems to be going well for us, we also forget that we have a higher self to strive constantly to live up to. In Islam, this higher self or true nature is known as *fitrah*—the objective towards which the Muslim aims throughout his or her life—over and over again.⁴⁹

It is ever important for the Sufi spiritual guide, as well as all spiritual directors and guides, to remember that he nor she is the ultimate authority in the session—God is! “The spiritual guide will listen compassionately and fully to what the seeker says. After all, the Quran repeatedly asks, ‘Will you not see? Will you not listen?’...And, with humility, the guide always invokes God’s help. The guide or spiritual director may

⁴⁷I id.

⁴⁸ Rahman et al., *Into Light*, 38-39.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

recommend a reading or a practice from one of the four sources or share a story with the seeker to bring light to an issue.”⁵⁰

Areas of importance that the Sufi guide helps the seeker to remember and strive for are: The importance of group gatherings or *tariqah*, which cannot be over emphasized; compassion, as it pertains to self and others, it is not to be under estimated; seeking knowledge is a very important aspect of the Muslim’s way of life, and remembering the attributes and names of Allah, individually and in a group setting.

Brother Jamal provides an outline for Islamic spiritual direction but, with slight adaptations and adjustments, the list could be suitable for just about any faith tradition or belief system.

- ❖ Steadfastness in religious or spiritual life
- ❖ Relationship with God (or *Higher Mind of of Universal Intelligence*)...
- ❖ Relationship with community...
- ❖ Relationship with imam, Shaykh, teacher, guide...
- ❖ Personal responsibility for spiritual life...adherence to spiritual life during times of ease and challenge...
- ❖ Seek guidance to stay on the path to God(and *enlightenment*)...
- ❖ Choose a spiritual guide carefully—one who is knowledgeable and of good moral character...
- ❖ Remember that the Quran (*Holy Scripture/ Sacred Text*) is, in itself, a guide...
- ❖ Remember that God is the authority...
- ❖ Compassion is strength and life is bestowing...
- ❖ In community, recite, chant and sing God’s beautiful names or verses from the Quran (or *Holy Scripture and Sacred Texts*)...
- ❖ Seek knowledge...⁵¹

One very important component of the Muslim’s spiritual development is the pursuit of knowledge—learning and studying. A prayer in the Quran says “O God,

⁵⁰ Ibid., 40-41.

⁵¹ Rahman et al., 35-41.

advance me in knowledge.” (20:114)...The Prophet said, “Move from knowledge of the tongue to knowledge of the heart.”⁵²

John Mabry, scholar and theologian, addresses Islam and spiritual direction in ways that are specific to Islam, but also in ways that can apply to other faith traditions and that which leads any seeker to participate in spiritual direction. One of the first issues he raises is the inner challenge, struggle or turmoil—also known as the inner jihad or the greater jihad.

Muhammad insisted that the greatest struggle—or jihad—was an internal one. It was a struggle against pride, ego, greed and selfishness, cruelty and stubbornness.⁵³

Mabry also refers to the five principles of Islam that are basic to Muslims: Belief in one God and the prophesy of the messenger Muhammad; prayer; fasting; alms giving or charity and pilgrimage (Hajj). In addition, he says that it is very helpful for spiritual guides to have a variety of spiritual disciplines as a knowledge base because “understanding history, purpose, and a variety of methods for each discipline will help us to know when to recommend a spiritual practice to our clients, and which discipline might be appropriate.”⁵⁴ It is important to note here that Mabry is speaking of Islamic spiritual direction **and** interfaith spiritual direction.

Seemingly, returning to where he began, Mabry again places emphasis on the greater *jihad*—the journey within. He says that, as spiritual guides it is important to recognize the greater *jihad*, the battle that takes place within each of us, is more important than any exterior conflict, because it is within the human soul that the salvation

⁵² Ibid., 41.

⁵³ John Mabry, *Noticing the Divine* (Harrisburg, New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2006), 126.

⁵⁴ John Mabry, *Noticing the Divine*, 129.

of the world resides, not in weapons and armor, but in the ability to say, "not my will, but thine."⁵⁵ Stated differently, the major obstacles on life's journey pertain to ourselves—moving ourselves and our egos out of our own paths. This pertains to Muslims and non Muslims.

Brother Jamal referred to the Muslim's responsibility in his or her spiritual life, and the need to seek a guide and a community to assist one towards that end. John Mabry pointed to the inner struggle or the greater *jihad* that the seeker or directee is faced with, and that which the guide or spiritual director assists the directee in overcoming. Shaykha Fariha al-Jerrahi explains what Sufism is and how spiritual direction arose from it:

Sufism is the essence of the holy guidance he (*Muhammad*) received through direct revelation over a period of twenty-three years, which took form in his teaching and practice of spiritual companionship with the intimate knowers and lovers (*seekers*) of reality.⁵⁶

The shaykha also mentions the schools of belief and practice of the Muslim and the Sufi, stating that, during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, followers of Islam began to divide into two groups—"One representing a Sufi spirit, relied on the power of the heart and faith and, the other, representing a more orthodox approach, placed the emphasis on a meticulous observance of the law."⁵⁷

Also in Sufism, the spiritual companion, counselor, director or guide "...is both messenger and reflection of the Beloved (*God*)...Therefore, in Sufism the entire path is traversed with the guide." Additionally, in Sufism, the relationship of

⁵⁵ Ibid., 143.

⁵⁶ Shaykha Fariha al Jerrahi, *Tending the Holy: Spiritual Direction Across Traditions*, ed. Norvene Vest (Harrisburg, PA: 2009), 19.

⁵⁷ Shaykha Fariha al Jerrahi, *Tending the Holy*, 20.

counselee/counselor or directee/director is referred to as “dervish (disciple) and Shaykh (teacher).” Sufism, like Islam, recognizes prophets other than Prophet Muhammad. In Sufism:

It is recognized that Jesus represents the mystic path, Moses the holy law, Abraham the station of truth, and Muhammad the spiritual gnosis. Therefore, the way of the Sufi is inclusive and all embracing.⁵⁸

In Islam, Jews and Christians are recognized as People of the Book—the Quran.

Important aspects that an interfaith spiritual director would want to be aware of regarding the Muslim or the Sufi are: “Allah alone desires souls and draws them back to the Source.”⁵⁹ The shaykh or teacher does not tell the dervish or seeker what to do with his or her life. Even though there are teachings, talks and counsel, the guidance is subtle. Most teaching is done within the group, but a dervish may request a one-to-one session.⁶⁰

Even though a Muslim or Sufi is expected to meet specific requirements, the shaykh or guide is not to use force in his or her teachings and direction. Most Muslims are aware of this and often utter that, “There is no compulsion in Islam!” The shaykha states, “This is why Allah states in the Holy Quran that there is no coercion in religion!”⁶¹

Muslims realize that they are responsible for their spiritual development. They also realize that there is choice and free will but, ultimately, it is Allah’s will.

BUDDHIST SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

⁵⁸ Shaykha Fariha al Jerrahi, *Tending the Holy*, 20, 23.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 27.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 29.

⁶¹ Ibid., 31.

Buddhism, founded 2,500 years ago in India...Founder Gautama Siddhartha, known as Buddha.⁶²

One of the first things that differentiates and distinguishes Buddhism from the three Abrahamic traditions mentioned earlier revolves around theism, non-theism or atheism. The common thread in the Abrahamic faiths is God. Jews and Muslims believe that God is the Supreme Sovereign of the universe—without image, without intercessors or partners. Christians believe that God is triune—the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, known as the Trinity. They worship God through the image of the Son, Jesus. There is no deity in Buddhism. Buddha, or the Buddha, is not praised or worshiped. Even though statues of the Buddha may be present in temples or on altars, they are there as reminders that followers aspire to be like the Buddha—reach enlightenment.

These figures (*statues of Buddha*) are representative of states of mind. The word 'Buddha' means 'Awakened one.' It is not a proper name but a title given to a man Siddhartha, the historic 'Shakyamuni Buddha,' literally The awakened one of the Shakya clan, the founder of Buddhism.⁶³

To understand Buddhism it is of the utmost importance that observers and seekers have some sense and understanding of the Buddha's life and those who were impacted by it. The Buddha was known as a man of striking dispositions—a combination of a cool head and a warm heart; a blend that shielded him from sentimentality on the one hand and indifference on the other.⁶⁴

The Buddha was an Indian prince who had everything in the physical world. He was born around 563 B.C. in what is now Nepal, near the Indian border. He was

⁶² Pravin K. Shah, *World Religions*, 17.

⁶³ Rev Kobutsu Malone, *Chaplaincy Guidelines for Zen Buddhism: A Preliminary Document* (Ramsey, NJ: The Engaged Zen Foundation, 1999), 2-3.

⁶⁴ Huston Smith, *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1961), 88-89.

handsome, he had servants, he married and his wife bore him a son, but in his twenties, he began to yearn for something more. His father, the king, tried to shield him from everything unpleasant. However, during rides outside of the palace, he witnessed poverty, old age, sickness and death. It was when he saw a monk simply clothed, walking with a bowl and accepting donations of food, that he witnessed withdrawal from the worldly life.⁶⁵

Gautama shaved his head, removed his princely robes, donned simple garments and set out to the forest in search of enlightenment over a period of six years. He sat with two of the leading Hindu masters and later joined a group of ascetics. The third phase of his quest he underwent strenuous thought and mystic concentration, sitting under the Bo or Bodhi tree. Vowing not to arise until enlightenment was his, he emerged with the Great Awakening forty-nine days later as the Buddha. From that time, he preached his ego-shattering, life redeeming message for almost five decades. During that period, he founded an order of monks and nuns. Between his preaching, he withdrew three times a day to sit and return his attention to meditation—its sacred source.⁶⁶

Much in the same way that a Christian aims to be Christ-like, and the Muslim strives to follow the behavior of the Prophet Muhammad, the Buddhist makes the effort to pattern his or her life after that of the Buddha's. John Mabry says, "For the Buddhist, everyone must have compassion for himself first and compassion for the rest of creation will follow."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Smith, *World's Religions*, 83.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 87.

⁶⁷ Mabry, *Noticing the Divine*, 61.

Sally Taylor, a practitioner of Zen Buddhism, gives an idea of what spiritual direction is in Buddhism. In most traditions there is some form of spiritual guidance, mentoring or direction to help seekers apply spiritual understanding in everyday life. Buddhist practice does not typically speak of spiritual direction, but the student-teacher relationship that is usually referred to in Buddhism is comparative. The Buddhist who is seeking a greater understanding of life and reality is encouraged to go to his or her teachers for guidance. The teacher offers a listening ear and reflection.⁶⁸

Aside from development of compassion for self and all beings, two important aims in Buddhism are relief from all suffering and enlightenment. The way in which to reach these stages is to overcome or rise above the ego, disallowing oneself to be distracted by world illusions. From different perspectives, the seekers of other faith traditions strive for something similar: Muslims, to remain on the right path to God and Christians, to achieve salvation. In order to achieve such heights, one must avoid temptations and what is considered wrongful, sinful behavior that may eventually or ultimately lead to one's suffering and self destruction.

The role of a Buddhist spiritual director is to listen and share in a compassionate way that which is expressed by the directee. The director recognizes the directee's potential Buddha nature and helps make clear the steps to be taken on the journey toward freedom from suffering and its causes. The director helps to lead the directee to see clearly what is standing in the way of happiness and inspires the directee to move toward ultimate freedom from suffering.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Sally Taylor, "What to Expect in Buddhist Spiritual Direction," *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction* 13, no 3 September, 2007, 47.

⁶⁹ Sally Taylor, *Buddhist Spiritual Direction*, 47-48.

Although every seeker is responsible for her or his spiritual life, attending spiritual direction sessions or sitting in the presence of the teacher is with the hope and expectation that, with proper guidance, the goal of a spiritually balanced life can and will be met. The Buddhist who sits with his or her teacher is requesting assistance or spiritual direction in a Buddhist context. He or she is asking for assistance with the alignment of self with that which is real and dissolving the obscurities created in life, that interfere with that goal. The whole of Buddhist practice is for the development of *love* and compassion for all beings. “*Love* is the wish for all beings to be happy, and *compassion* is the wish for all beings to be free from suffering.”⁷⁰

Part of a seeker’s responsibility is to choose a teacher he or she feels comfortable with—a teacher who has good fundamental knowledge of the path on which the seeker chooses to walk. This also requires some independent learning and studying on the part of the seeker. Taylor explains the role between teacher and student, or director and directee in the Buddhist context, which sounds somewhat different from that which has been heard from the Abrahamic context of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, where the spiritual director is not the authority in the session, but God is:

Responsibilities of students toward their teachers or *lamas*...involve a willing submission to the teacher...it is wisest to listen to what wisdom is offered as coming from the Buddha himself.⁷¹

One very important aspect of spiritual direction that both the director and the directee should understand, in view of a specific faith tradition or none, is that the session does not have to be restricted to religious doctrine and practice. It could be about

⁷⁰ Sally Taylor, *Buddhist Spiritual Direction*, 48.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

anything that may interfere with one's goal to achieve balance in his or her spiritual life. Though it's been said other times, other ways, Taylor provides us the reminder that, "Your whole life is your spiritual life... You need not be limited to meditation... specific practices and texts."⁷²

Spiritual direction may be specific to one's faith tradition, especially if the goal is for the seeker to become a better and truer devotee of his or her faith tradition. Such may include the belief in God, prayer, scripture and behaving in a prescribed manner in order to live a wholesome life with comfort and ease—a blessed life. On the other hand, humankind does not spend its time on prayer and scripture alone in a twenty-four hour period, but rather in other areas of life and activities of daily living—family relations, marriage, personal and professional goals, school and work relationships, health concerns and financial matters. Such issues impact upon and interrupt one's spiritual practices, and the integrity of one's spiritual life can also interact and impact on everything that is taking place in one's life—the mundane aspects of one's everyday human existence. It then stands to reason that it does not matter whether one is of the Jewish, Christian, Islamic or Buddhist tradition. Almost all human beings have the same or similar concerns and issues. In other words, a common thread runs through every life, no matter the religious or spiritual belief system—or the lack thereof.

INTERSPIRITUAL SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Interspiritual spiritual direction is now available to those seekers who may be followers of a particular faith tradition but are comfortable, confident and interested in exploring or studying others; persons who have come from a family background where a

⁷² Ibid., 50.

religion was practiced that they are no longer satisfied with and are looking for another way or other ways to express and fulfill their spiritual longings; persons who come from family backgrounds where religion or spirituality was not an integral part of growing up, who are now seeking to include spirituality in their lives; persons who do not follow any specific faith tradition and feel comfortable borrowing from many, and individuals who may be theistic or non-theistic in their approach to spirituality.

Freya Secrest and Suzanne A Fageol, in their discussion on interspiritual spiritual direction, give an overview:

Interspirituality has its roots in interreligious dialogue that have occurred from early history...the Hellenistic period (fourth to first centuries BCE), and the Megdha period (546-324 BCE), when Hinduism encountered Buddhism. Similar encounters and dialogues emerged when brought to public attention in 1893 with the first World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, USA.⁷³

Such recognition and exploration stems from a broader approach where a less broad approach where a body or group of individuals from one tradition may dialogue and then reach an agreement and decision to dialogue with a group from another or other traditions. Also, representatives from various traditions may opt to meet and dialogue in an effort to find common threads and truths between their faiths.

The spiritual director and the directee, on individual levels, may take the same approach and commit themselves to the study and exploration of many faith traditions—the director in an effort to respect and understand other traditions for personal and professional knowledge as well as to assist directees and seekers in their explorations; the

⁷³ Freya Secrest and Suzanne A. Fageol, “What to Expect in Interspiritual Spiritual Direction,” *Presence: An International of Spiritual Direction* 14, no 1 (March 2008), 7.

directee in an effort to find his or her truth, which may be to choose one path, a new path or many paths.

It's evident that interfaith or interspirituality, like spiritual direction, arises out of ancient schools of thoughts—beliefs and practices, where different communities evolved into different religions and then encountered each other. Some remarks from Wayne Teasdale, author of *The Mystic Heart*, help to clarify the concept of interspirituality:

A spiritual interdependence also exists between and among the world's religions. This interdependence is more subtle, though the actual impact of traditions on each other is clearly discernable in history, particularly where cultural contiguity exists.⁷⁴

Interspirituality is not or may not be for everybody. A rabbi said recently: "Those who hop from faith to faith are spiritually promiscuous." A Baptist reverend also said very recently, "Dabbling in too many faiths may cause me to lose my own faith," and a Muslim, who is also a college professor, said, "Muhammad is the last and the seal of the prophets. There will be no further revelations after him. The Quran is the final word of the People of the book. There is no need to look elsewhere!" These statements were made by three individuals, one from each of the three Abrahamic religions. Without a doubt, there are others from their faiths and other faiths who share the same sentiments, but there are also a growing number of faithful who are willing to listen and engage those of other faiths.

Studying and learning about other religions does not mean that one has to lose belief in his or her own faith tradition. Making attempts to know and understand what others believe in order to build peace with those who believe differently does not suggest that one has to abandon his or her religion. When there is security in the faith tradition of

⁷⁴ Wayne Teasdale, *Mystic Heart*, 5-6.

family and childhood or a religion of choice once one reaches adulthood, there is no need for concern. Some individuals are more curious and interested and simply want to know for personal and professional reasons. Others explore different traditions because they are searching for something that will give them meaning in their lives. Secrest and Fageol address the issue, Interspirituality is not about eliminating the world's religions. On the contrary, it is an effort to make available to everyone all the different and diverse forms the spiritual journey assumes. The path of interspirituality also encompasses aspects of contemporary culture and new expressions of spirituality.⁷⁵

While some, or most, may be satisfied with the one faith tradition of their family background or that of their choice, there are others who experience a need for something more. It could simply be a need to know, a feeling of something missing, a way to sample what the other experiences or simply a way to build bridges with others. Here again, Secrest and Fageol give insight as to why some seekers may be considering or moving in the direction of interfaith and interspirituality. Because one faith community may not provide the support needed, one might find him or herself participating in a variety of communal celebrations and devotional practices. It might be a Sufi Universal Dance of Peace, a winter solstice ritual, or a meditation at the Zen Dojo. Interfaith exchange is becoming increasingly popular. More individuals, neighborhoods and faith communities are exploring and sharing. Some examples may be Christians celebrating a Passover Seder with Jews; a neighborhood celebrating the Hindu festival of Diwali; a

⁷⁵ Secrest and Fageol, *Interspiritual Spiritual Direction*, 8.

group of people from different faiths chanting a Hindu mantra or doing a Sufi heart meditation.⁷⁶

Whether in congregational worship and practice or on an individual quest, each seeker is ultimately on his or her own spiritual journey. Some are willing to adhere to the faith of their ancestors and families without question because it is tradition and the tradition he or she believes in; some, because it is all that he or she knows and chooses to know, and others who chose the “one truth, many paths” philosophy because it feeds their spirits in a variety of ways. Interspiritual spiritual direction is available to them to assist them in weaving their pieces together in an attempt to bring about a seamlessness, wholeness and spiritual well being.

The core of interspiritual direction is to bring one into deeper resonance with the Sacred. This in turn leads to integration and coherency in one’s spiritual practice and in the entirety of one’s life...Interspiritual seekers value their independence. They need the freedom to explore and define their partnerships with the Sacred in their own unique way.⁷⁷

Even though different and various communities of humankind each practiced their religions in vacuums during ancient times, they also encountered each other and took part in interreligious dialogue. They also experienced long periods of conflict until attempts were made in the late nineteenth century to bring religious groups together to study and compare beliefs and practices. These attempts have led to a broader interest in interfaith and interspiritual studies and encounters on the part of religious groups and individual seekers. These attempts have also paved the way and opened doors for spiritual direction to integrate such concepts into its discipline and ministry, thereby providing an avenue

⁷⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁷ Secrest and Fageol, *Interspiritual Spiritual Direction*, 11-12.

for those seekers, who are not married to any one faith, to explore and receive support in finding their own unique spiritual path and practice.

The history of spiritual direction sprouts forth from the roots of religious beliefs and faith practices. Its history is specific to the times of the beginning, founding and initiation of each faith tradition. The founders of each tradition were the spiritual counselors, directors and guides who had been guided by God and the Universal Source of Supreme Intelligence. The founders, messengers and prophets brought their revelations to the people. Their early converts, disciples and followers became the Desert Parents, Godparents, Grandparents and elders who learned, taught and led and, in turn, became the spiritual counselors, directors and guides. The scribes recorded the messages and revelations that, over time, became the written word—the Holy Scriptures and the Sacred Texts of the different traditions.

CHAPTER 3

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES AND SACRED TEXTS

Clearly, God *is* the ultimate companion, counselor, director and guide. The Holy Quran states: “The Guidance of God—that is the only Guidance. (Quran 2:120).⁷⁸

God spoke to the prophets and prophetesses through the ages so that they could bring messages to humankind through spoken word, deed and scribe. The revelations, messages and teachings were captured into what is known as the Holy Scriptures and Sacred Texts. Most faith traditions have a book by which its adherents and followers are guided and live by. The holy books mentioned here are those that are from the traditions of the directees in this project—Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism.

JEWISH HOLY SCRIPTURES AND SACRED TEXTS

The basic source of Jewish belief is the Hebrew Bible, often referred to by Christians as the Old Testament. Its first five books are called the Torah or the Pentateuch of Moses—the Five Books of Moses. The five books are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Torah means “law and teaching.” The Torah was traditionally regarded as the primary revelation of God and his law to humanity to his spokesman Moses on Mount Sinai. The Torah is considered eternal truth. Its laws were

⁷⁸Jamal Rahman, et al., *Out of Darkness into Light*, 3.

made clear and elaborated upon in the oral Torah, or in the traditions of the elders. Then the law was written down in the Mishnah and Talmud.⁷⁹

The Ten Commandments serve as perfect reminders that spiritual direction can address all areas of life—religious and secular. The first four commandments address one’s direct relationship with God. The six commandments that follow, cover human relationships, behavior, thoughts and emotions—issues that arise in spiritual direction sessions.

John Hart, theologian and therapist, reminds us that “Spiritual people have many other concerns besides prayer and discernment and usually appreciate all the feedback they get from any perspective if it is helpful.”⁸⁰ He also states in another source, two years later, “Everything that is going on in your life is grist for that mysterious, open-ended creative process.”⁸¹

For those who may think, for instance, that the Ten Commandments are from centuries past and are, perhaps, no longer relevant today, Leonard Felder, Ph. D., psychologist, has recreated them and applies them in the sessions of his psychology practice to relate to his clients and today’s problems. In a sense, it brings us up to modern day spiritual direction and modern day problems. When Moses, the spiritual director of the Hebrew, Jewish people, brought the tablets, they were named the Ten Commandments. Felder calls them the Ten Challenges: 1) Discovering the still small voice within. 2) Breaking free of unfulfilling paths and habits. 3) Learning to control

⁷⁹Pravin K. Shah, *Unity in Diversity*, 46.

⁸⁰ John Hart, “Pastoral Counseling or Spiritual Direction: What’s the Difference?” *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction* 11 no 2 (June 2005), 10.

⁸¹ John Hart, “What to Expect in Christian Spiritual Direction,” *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction* (2007), 42.

anger, insecurity, and self righteousness. 4) The struggle to unhook from your everyday pressures and connect with something profoundly joyful. 5) How do you honor a parent when there's tension between you? 6) What you can do to prevent the crushing of a person's spirit. 7) How to elevate your sexuality to greater sacredness and fulfillment. 8) Accomplishing your goals without mistreating other people. 9) Reducing gossip and hurtful talk in your daily life. 10) The way to feel good about what you have.⁸²

CHRISTIAN HOLY SCRIPTURES AND SACRED TEXTS

The major source of Christian belief is the Christian Bible or the Holy Bible, which consists of the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament or 39 Books of the Hebrew Bible of the Jewish people, was originally written in Hebrew, and the New Testament contains 27 Books covering the life of the Christ and his teachings; Greek is one of the original languages it was written in. Jesus, the Christ left no writings, but he did choose twelve apostles or disciples to preach the Christian doctrine. Some Christian sects or denominations like the Catholics (and some Protestants) also recognize seven additional Books of the Apocrypha.⁸³ Apocrypha refers to hidden. The name is given to a group of Jewish writings dating from about 300 B.C. to A.D. 70. "It is a term that denotes the thirteen words contained in the oldest Greek codices..."⁸⁴ the scriptures that

⁸² Leonard Felder, Ph.D., *The Ten Challenges: Spiritual Lessons From the Ten Commandments for Creating Meaning, Growth and Richness Every Day of Your Life* (Salem, Wisconsin: Sheffield Publishing Company, 2004).

⁸³ Pravin K. Shah, *Unity in Diversity*, 56.

⁸⁴ Geoffrey Wigoder, *The Illustrated Dictionary & Concordance of the Bible* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 2005), 85.

are specifically Christian—the Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Revelation—are called the Christian Testament rather than the New Testament.⁸⁵

ISLAMIC HOLY SCRIPTURES AND SACRED TEXTS

The Holy Quran, the Hadith or Sunnah and the Sharia are the main Islamic texts to which Muslims refer to seek guidance for governing their lives. The Quran itself states:

This is the Book; in it is guidance for sure. (Quran 2:2).⁸⁶

The Quran is God's speech written in Arabic. It is the holy and sacred book of Islam, which is the religion of Abraham, or Ibrahim to Muslims. Ibrahim is the patriarch who rejected idolatry, who approached God with a pure heart and who responded to and obeyed God's directive to sacrifice his son. Ibrahim served God without question—uncompromisingly, unconditionally and unequivocally.⁸⁷

The Quran contains the revelations from God to the Prophet Muhammad. The Quran states that Muhammad is the last and the seal of all the prophets who preceded him—from Adam, Abraham, Noah, Moses and Jesus. Muhammad left the Quran, the Word of God, for the future guidance of the community. The Sunnah, which is the collective name for his life, including his behavior and his sayings, is recorded in the traditional literature of the Hadith.⁸⁸ The Hadith means literally speech, report, account, and it's specific to the deeds and utterances of the Prophet as recounted by his

⁸⁵ Jamal Rahman, *Out of Darkness, Into Light*, xxvii.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁸⁷ Pravin K. Shah, *Unity in Diversity*, 62.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 63.

companions. The Sunnah is the spoken and acted examples of the Prophet,⁸⁹ a model of behavior by which Muslims aspire to pattern their lives. The Sharia is the prescribed and revealed religious law or the canonical law of Islam as put forth by the Quran and the Sunnah.⁹⁰

The Quran, the Holy Scripture The Sunnah (customs) of the Prophet, which embodied the Hadith (tradition) Qiyas (analogy), the application of a decision of the past, or the principles on which it was based, to new questions Jma (consensus) the consensus of the community of believers, who, according to a saying of the Prophet, would not agree on any error.⁹¹

BUDDHIST HOLY SCRIPTURES AND SACRED TEXTS

There are two major scriptures in Buddhism. The Tripitaka, or three baskets of wisdom, which is for the Theravada sect. It consists of discourses known as Sutta; rules of conduct, known as vinaya; and analysis of the doctrine, known as Abhidamma. It is written in the Pali Prakrit language.

The Sutras is for the Mahayana sects. The major Sutras are Anguttara, Nikaya, Dhamapada, Sutta Nipatta, and Samyutta Kikaya. They are written in Sanskrit overlapped with Pali. Zen Buddhism is a major sect of Mahayana, commonly found in Taiwan, Korea, and Japan, and among Tibetan peoples. The Buddhist subject in this project is from one of the Mahayana sects—Zen. The Dhammapada is an example of one of the Sacred Texts. The primary goal of Buddhism is Nirvana, which the Theravada followers describe as peace and tranquility, and the Mahayana followers view as emptiness. Nirvana is synonymous with the release of desire, ego, suffering and rebirth.

⁸⁹ Cyril Glasse, *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam: Revised Edition* (London, W84BH: Stacey International, 2001), 441.

⁹⁰ Glasse, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 419.

⁹¹ Pravin K. Shah, *Unity in Diversity*, 65.

Eknath Easwaran, a writer, lecturer and professor of English literature, translated the Dhammapada for today's readers and students of theology. He says of the Dhammapada, the Sacred Texts of the Mahayana Buddhists:

The Dhammapada...is a collection of vivid, practical verses, gathered probably from the direct disciples who wanted to preserve what they had heard from the Buddha himself...Dhammapada means something like 'the path of dhama'—of truth, of righteousness, of the central law that all is one.⁹²

Most of the world's religious traditions have Holy Scriptures and Sacred Texts by which followers are guided. Of the four that were mentioned in this chapter, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, all have Holy Books and paths of attainment that provide prescriptions of guidance for spiritual and mundane life—direction for a life that is spiritually balanced.

The Holy Scriptures and Sacred Texts are available to us with stories that can relate to various areas of our lives; to provide comfort, encouragement, support, inspiration and guidance; with beautiful poetic language; to remind us of how God spoke to the messengers, how God can speak to us, and how God can help us to speak with others in ways that help them to find their path to God and the power within.

Of the four traditions included in this project, there are three common threads: Each tradition has a charismatic leader; each leader left teaching or scriptures by which their followers could be guided, and the adherents of each tradition strive to practice the ways in which their leader practiced—each of whom were master spiritual directors

⁹² Eknath Easwaran, *The Dhamapada: Translated for the Modern Reader* (Tomales, California: Nilgiri Press, 2004), 7.

during the time periods in which their traditions were founded. They have brought us to the path of spiritual direction that we are on today.

As Islam is the third of the Abrahamic traditions and recognizes the preceding prophets, especially Moses and Jesus, it is an inclusive religion. During his time, Muhammad's world view included Judaism and Christianity, those who are referred to as People of the Book. Because of his inclusivity, it is my contention that, had Muhammad lived longer and was exposed to more faiths, he would have been even more embracing. Even though Muhammad was inclusive, Muslims are still expected to do missionary work and bring others to the fold of Islam. The Arabic word *dawa* or *dawah* is one of them. *Dawa* literally means call or missionary work.⁹³

Since, this demonstration project will explore how a Muslim spiritual director can be effective in a multifaith context, challenges the meaning of *dawa* if this is an action that is expected and required of Muslims, to draw others to the faith of Islam. Is it legal, according to Islam, for a Muslim to help a non Muslim to find her or his way to the truth if it is not Islam?

John L. Esposito, a professor and theologian, discusses *dawa*, missionary work, pertaining to Islam as no different from that of Christianity:

Islam, like Christianity, is a global religion with a universal mission, calling all humankind to worship the one true God...from earliest times, Muslims of all walks of life have therefore engaged in propagating their faith (*dawa* the call) wherever they went...As in the past, today many Muslims stand ready to be a witness to their faith through preaching, writing, for example.⁹⁴

⁹³ John L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions from One of America's Leading Experts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 182.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

In spite of this expected action or required mission, that which is to be taken into consideration is the consistent reminder of “The People of the Book.” Others such as Jews and Christians fall into this category. Additionally, might the Prophet Muhammad have included others had he lived longer and was exposed to other faiths? Would he have included others as he evolved in his own spiritually?

To begin with, one of the unspoken focal points and objectives of this project as well as this ministry of spiritual direction, is to help all people to move beyond tolerance and move toward acceptance of our differences and similarities; to understand each other better and respect each other more; to build peace with each other—together, and to do so by example of peaceful approach rather than coercion. There is no agenda to change anyone’s beliefs, keeping in mind the words from the Holy Quran:

Allah (God) separated us into tribes and nations so that we may know each other (Quran 49:13).⁹⁵

If an individual can find her or his way to God and self through spiritual direction with a Muslim spiritual director, something that God wants of us has been accomplished and fulfilled—to know God *and* to “know each other.” If someone decides to embrace Islam as a result of being in the presence of a Muslim spiritual director, it would be her or his choice. Shaykh Jamal Rahman, a Muslim and an interfaith spiritual director, offers advice that supports this way of thinking:

Of particular importance to us who are focused on spiritual guidance, Quran cautions us, ‘O People of the Book! Commit no excess in your religion’ (4:171).⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Jamal Rahman, *Out of Darkness into Light*, 61.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 193.

Rahman goes on to say that “an excessive ego attachment to ‘truth’ can result in hurtful remarks that serve neither charity nor truth itself.”⁹⁷ More importantly, he reminds us that “God has purposely created ‘diversity of tongues and colors’ (3022) and has designated ‘for everyone...a law and a way of life (5:48).’ If God wished, says the Quran, we could have been created ‘a single people,’ but God had other plans. ‘Strive then with one another in doing good. Your goal is God (5:48).’”⁹⁸

Although Muslims are expected to perform *dawa*, the Quran contains clear instructions regarding respectful behavior towards non Muslims; learning of and knowing each other; avoidance of extremism and ego-based proselytizing, and understanding that each has “a law and a way.” In addition, “Your goal is God.” If the goal is God and a Muslim has helped a non Muslim find her or his way to God, no violation has been committed.

Christine Huda Dodge, who served as the Women’s Committee Chair and the Education Coordinator of her local mosque in Corvallis, Oregon, says of *dawa* that Muslims are encouraged to engage in respectful dialogue with People of the Book and those of other faiths. “And do not dispute with People of the Book, except in ways that are best (29:46).” In general, Muslims try to avoid heated arguments or endless discord concerning matters of faith. They are, however, encouraged to invite others to the faith using the call or missionary work, *dawa*. Muslims do not have an organized missionary program, but they are instructed to use good manners when they speak of their faith to others. “Invite to the Way of the Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching, and discuss

⁹⁷ Jamal Rahman, *Out of Darkness into Light*, 194.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 63.

with them in ways that are best and most gracious. For thy Lord knows best who have strayed from His path, and who receives guidance (16:25).” Dodge states that “Most Muslims are happy to answer questions about their faith, as long as the questioner has a genuine desire to learn and not ridicule.”⁹⁹

The aforementioned information from the Quran, as well as from scholars and theologians, demonstrate that a Muslim can do multifaith spiritual direction.

⁹⁹Christine Huda Dodge, *The Everything Understanding Islam Book: A complete and easy-to-read guide to Muslim beliefs, practices, traditions, and culture* (Avon, MA: Adams Media Corporation, 2003), 125).

CHAPTER 4

WOMEN IN ISLAM

There are Muslims and Sufis who offer and provide the service of spiritual direction, and who also conduct interfaith sessions. In Islam it is usually the role of the imam or Shaykh, and they happen to be male. My intention to offer and provide spiritual direction as a Muslim woman is likely to raise questions within and outside of the Islamic community—who or what gives me the authority, or am I allowed to perform such services? A Muslim woman who assumes the role may likely do so within the confines of the Islamic community—in Islamic countries and also here in the United States. Further, the role may be confined to serving females only and not a mix gendered population. The idea of a woman providing spiritual direction in the interfaith, multifaith and interspiritual context may also be considered a stretch of the limits—the limits that have been imposed by men, not God.

To begin with, I am an atypical Muslim woman. I was not born or reared in an Islamic family or community. Once I converted to Islam in my late teens, I was not confined to a strict Islamic community. I was born in the United States, where I attended schools and functioned in various work settings in the presence of males. In my early years, I was exposed to other Christian denominations outside of the Christian home in which I was born and reared. In my early teens, I was exposed to various faith traditions, which first aroused my curiosity and then my interest in religions outside of my home

environment—ultimately leading me to my decision to convert to Islam. In my later years, I attended an interfaith ministry program and an interspiritual spiritual counseling program—all culminating in my choice to enter a multifaith doctoral program, in a Christian seminary. This brings me full circle to my early beginnings—interest in learning about other faiths; yet, doing so while I continue to learn more about my chosen faith, Islam.

The world is multiracial, multicultural and multifaith. The United States is a microcosm of the world. It is no longer the melting pot as it was once known – Native Americans, European Christian immigrants, and African Descendants. United States citizens and residents hail from the four corners of the world, bringing with them their racial, cultural and religious identities – all a part of the American fabric and no longer confined to books, television sets or movie screens. It could be a next door neighbor, a co-worker a desk away or a child’s playmate. If we want our society and our world to be more peaceful, it is left to each of us, no matter our faith tradition, or our gender, to get to know each other and take initiatives to build that peace.

Assuming a role of authority or leadership as a Muslim woman is not unheard of or disallowed. Roles that women assumed in early Islam attest to that. The Hadith, actions and sayings of the Prophet, document that women had roles of authority and leadership—a number of which were appointed and delegated by the Prophet. In addition, scholars and theologians speak of those roles—one being that of the woman Um Waraqa, appointed imamah of her mix gendered community, by the Prophet. She and others will be addressed later on.

As an American Muslim and an African-American Muslim woman, I have been exposed to a multiracial, multicultural, multiethnic, multifaith and mix gendered existence. I have experienced racial, religious and gender bias, and am likely to encounter such “isms” again before I leave earth’s atmosphere. All that I have been exposed to, experienced and learned make me who I am up to this present moment—with room to continue growing. While my role as a multifaith spiritual director may cause concern and curiosity to some within and outside of the Islamic community, it does not confine me, define me or deter me from performing the role that I am called to. Men have assumed and usurped roles of authority and leadership, excluded women from such roles, and have assigned roles of limitation to women—all to maintain authority and control. This is man’s doing, not God’s. A woman, any woman, including a Muslim woman, can assume the role of spiritual director, not because she is intuitive, nurturing and tender but by hearing, listening, being guided and led by the call and authority of God. I, as a Muslim woman, take back the authority that was given by God from the very beginning. This is my theology—revisiting the rights of women, rights that were taken away in the pre-Islamic period and returned by the Prophet in the early period of Islam. The Prophet listened to the voice and word of God—the God who also knows what is in my heart. One does not have to be typical in order to be faithful, and one does not have to be typical in order to be authentic. Thus, I am an African American Muslim woman who is an interfaith minister and interspiritual spiritual director, having recently attended a doctoral program in ministry with a multifaith context, residing in a pluralistic society.

Further content in this chapter is written with intent to discuss and give clarity to some of the beliefs, misconceptions and opinions held of women in Islam. This discussion will address women in Islam as a topic of discourse in non Muslim and interfaith settings; female status in general, prior to the Abrahamic traditions, and in the pre-Islamic period; female rights that were introduced by the Prophet Muhammad, ; the roles, status and contributions of Muslim women in early Islam, and the contributions that are being made by modern-day women in Islam, especially those who do not confine themselves to the Islamic community, but reach out to non Muslims in interfaith and multifaith settings. This information is important to the Muslim women who may want to take on roles of authority or leadership but hesitate to do so because they have been taught to believe that they cannot.

Two Muslim males, Muhammad Shafiq and Mohammed Abu-Nimar claim that gender equality is an important theme because non Muslims hold the belief that Islam, as a religion, promotes oppression of women and deprivation of their rights. They believe that a way in which to combat these misconceptions is through the interfaith dialogue process and, in doing so, it is very important to differentiate between cultural customs and authentic Islamic teaching.¹⁰⁰

When dialogue involves the topic of Muslim women or women in Islam, the discussion inevitably revolves around the issues of abuse, brutality, control, lack of rights, polygamy, veiling, limited leadership status, especially in religious and spiritual roles, and other inflictions and restrictions—all in favor of and to the advantage of the Muslim male. In fact, when the topic of Islam is raised, comments and questions almost

¹⁰⁰ Shafiq, Muhammad, and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims* (Washington, D. C.: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007), 23.

always involve the status of the Muslim woman. The issues mentioned are not to be ignored or minimized. The question, however, is not whether women in Islam can assume leadership roles in the social, religious and spiritual realms, but how they have done so in the past; how they function currently, and how their roles are expanding and evolving.

The Muslim woman has an identity which, in a number of cases, is not exclusive to the Islamic community. One evolving role, referred to earlier and discussed throughout this thesis, is that of spiritual director. This chapter will explore the broader question of women in Islam and then focus it on the contributions made by Muslim women in leadership and spiritual roles that are significant to the Muslim and non Muslim communities.

The issues of misogyny mentioned above cannot be denied or overlooked, but they also depend upon who's involved in the discussion and why. This can vary greatly, and it also raises a number of questions: Is it Muslim women who live under oppression in countries and cultures where Islam is practiced? Is it progressive, feminist, Western Muslim women and Muslim women who are from various Islamic countries living in the West? Is it the Muslim men who practice oppressive behavior towards women and strive to maintain the status quo? Is it the more liberated, progressive Muslim men who believe in equality of the sexes? Is the discussion group all male, all female or of mixed gender? Is the group solely Muslim or Muslim and non-Muslim? Is the discussion based on misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the Quran, or is it a group whose objective is to foster clarity of such misinterpretations and misunderstandings, in an effort to arrive at

positive change in the lives of the Muslim women who are or may be subjected to the issues that are often discussed? Is it all of the above?

Undergirding the question of how women exercise leadership and spiritual roles from an Islamic identity or location lie another, deeper question: that of the overall status and role of women in Islam. While it is true that Islam is often described as harboring, if not promoting, tendencies that are misogynistic, it is equally true that it has done so in common with the other Abrahamic traditions (Judaism and Christianity). Some might debate that the misogyny within Islam has been greater or more pronounced, an argument that needs to be substantiated and in any case is only one of a matter of degree. At times, one can argue from history, that the situation for women has been better in Islam, at others better in Judaism and Christianity. But all three Abrahamic traditions have shared in these tendencies. Nonetheless, the common perception of the Muslim woman is revealed in the discussion between three women, each representing the three Abrahamic faiths, in a recent volume of, *The Faith Club: A Muslim, A Christian, A Jew—Three Women Search for Understanding*.

Ranya Idliby, a “Muslim woman of Palestinian heritage,” pointed out that Americans think of Islam as a religion of terrorism, fanatics, abused women and spoiled rich Arabs.¹⁰¹ Here may be a good time to briefly point out, that a Muslim, any Muslim, female or male, fits no particular profile. Not every Muslim is an Arab, and not every Arab is a Muslim. There are Middle Easterners who reside outside of Arabia who are considered Arabs, but not all are necessarily Muslims. Non Arab Muslims and non Arabic-speaking Muslims outnumber the Arab Muslim population in the worldwide

¹⁰¹ Ranya Idliby, Suzanne Oliver and Pricilla Warner, *The Faith Club: A Muslim, A Christian, A Jew—Three Women Search for Understanding* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 15.

Islamic community. The three Abrahamic faiths were all founded in the Middle East, but they have all spread globally. Middle Eastern Jews and Christians have no monopoly over Judaism and Christianity. Not every Jew speaks Hebrew nor every Christian Aramaic or Greek, and not every Muslim is an Arab. As an African-American woman, I do not fit the profile of what most people think a Muslim or Muslim woman is. Idliby's assessment regarding the views of Islam held by Americans may be correct to a large extent, but it's only a fraction of the picture or piece of the puzzle. Nonetheless, Idliby is fully aware of why people hold such perceptions of Islam, especially when it comes to women; but she, like many Muslim women and men, know that it has more to do with the misinterpretations of Islam and the Quran rather than Islam as it was prophesized by Muhammad (PBUH). A much larger problem is the long and determined effort in the West to discredit Islam on every front as offering anything that is true or good. In terms of gender, Islam continues to be consistently perceived in theological, academic and popular discourse in the West as "anti-women."

In the discussion, Suzanne Oliver, a Christian, expressed her "inability to justify the fact that most Muslim countries deny women equal rights."¹⁰² In defense of Prophet Muhammad, Idliby expressed that he championed women's rights,¹⁰³ Prophet Muhammad was not void of male idiosyncrasies, but neither is he viewed or reported by all non-Islamic scholars and theologians as a complete misogynist who wielded or advocated brutal force against women anymore than the Abrahamic prophets who preceded him—which will be discussed later on. Yet, the question of brutality was raised

¹⁰² Idliby. *Three Women Search for Understanding*, 69.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 114.

by Pricilla Warner, a Jewish woman: “What about extreme abuse of women, like stoning?”¹⁰⁴ Stoning, which is indeed an extreme measure that will result in severe injury or death should not, under any circumstances, be condoned or justified. Nonetheless, some light has to be shed on the topic in order to arrive at some clarity regarding the origin of such a brutal and cruel practice and who initiated it—first the Hebrews, and then the Christians, which will also be discussed later on.

As a reminder, Prophet Muhammad was the newest and last of the Abrahamic patriarchs. He learned from, borrowed from and incorporated into Islam some of the practices of his predecessors—the messengers, prophets and teachers before him. Let it not be forgotten that women were burned at the stake in America if they were believed to be witches.

The three women of the Faith Club discussed many other topics besides women in Islam—such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, yet the topic somehow found its way back to an issue concerning the Muslim woman. Warner said to Idliby:

But it’s not the Jews’ fault that our book says that we are promised land, and it’s not your fault that the Quran says you can have four wives.¹⁰⁵

References to the interfaith dialogue between the three women are intended to provide the observer an opportunity to see through a wall or peek through a window to get an idea of how these discussions unfold, whether the Muslim woman is a convert, such as myself, or a Muslim woman by birth, such as the case of the Palestinian-born Ranya Idliby. The observer should also know that different Muslim women are likely to respond differently to the same questions, depending on their country of origin and other

¹⁰⁴ Idliby, *Three Women Search for Understanding*, 144.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 132.

factors such as geographical location within their country and culture. There are many Muslims throughout the Islamic world who do not come from Saudia Arabia or the Middle East.

Obviously, there is much to be said about the woman in Islam, but there is also something to be said about the status of women prior to Islam, and the other two Abrahamic traditions. In her book, *When God Was a Woman*, Merlin Stone raises thought-provoking questions as she gives account of the religious practices, some of them female led, matriarchal social order and matrilineal heritage systems that pre-dated the patriarchal Abrahamic faith traditions. Whether it is accepted as truth and fact or viewed as fiction and myth, Stone presents, cover to cover, what could be the root cause of male dominance in the Abrahamic traditions. She poses something to ponder— to female **and** male alike.

Clearly, the status of male over female is not only socio-political and historical; it is also deeply rooted in religion. In spite of some advantages gained on the part of the female in the West, gender inequality is still a topic of discussion today. It could be *because* it is rooted in religion. The Jewish faith now has female rabbis, except in the most strict of the orthodox denominations; the Christian faith now has female bishops, ministers, pastors, preachers and reverends, except in the Catholic denomination where there is yet to be a female priest; but Muslims have yet to give official sanction to a female imam who leads prayers at the mosque in a mixed gender gathering. Even though the Profit appointed a woman imam of her mix-gendered community. Just sixty years ago a woman stated these words:

Men enjoy the great advantage of having a god endorse the code he writes and since man exercises a sovereign authority over women it is especially

fortunate that this authority has been vested in him by the Supreme Being. For the Jews, Mohammedans and Christians among others, man is master by divine right; the fear of God will therefore repress any impulse towards revolt in the downtrodden female.

Simone de Beauvoir
The Second Sex 1949¹⁰⁶

No doubt, women agreed with Ms. de Beauvoir then and, many would, under a number of circumstances, agree with her today. A little over twenty years later, Bishop C. L. Meyers made a statement opposing the ordination of women in the October 25, 1971 San Francisco Chronicle, giving an opinion and explanation that supported de Beauvoir's theory.

Episcopalian priesthood is a masculine conception. A priest is a God symbol whether he likes it or not... Christ is the source of Priesthood. The sexuality of Christ is no accident nor is his masculinity incidental. This is the divine choice.¹⁰⁷

Apparently, women were not always so downtrodden, and men did not always hold such attitudes and superior opinions of themselves—at least not when women were the rulers of some clans. In Thebes, Egypt during the fourteenth century BC, there were female-led religions that existed prior to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, when women held positions and ranks as high priestesses.¹⁰⁸

It's common knowledge to those who are adherents and devotees of the Abrahamic faiths that God reigns supreme, no god is to be praised except God and, for Jews and Muslims, there are no idols or images that depict God for praise and worship.

¹⁰⁶ Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman* (United States of America: Dorset Press, 1990), viii.

¹⁰⁷ Stone, *When God was a Woman*, ix.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, x-xiii.

While Jews and Muslims may question the Trinity or the Triune God, Christians believe that the three aspects are all one and the same—the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Based on her research and findings regarding the female-led religions and matrilineal lineage, Stone poses a number of questions as to how such systems were almost completely destroyed and replaced by males. Because these systems existed prior to the Abrahamic faiths, she challenges the reader to take a closer look at the story of Adam and Eve, believed by Jews, Christians and Muslims, to have occurred in the beginning of time, yet the event occurred in historic times as a result of Abraham, the patriarch of the Abrahamic faiths, who lived no earlier than the period between 1800 to 1550 BC. Stone describes the story of the Garden of Eden as “this creation legend” that was told to describe Eve as the sinner who succumbed to the serpent, ate the forbidden fruit, and tempted Adam to do so. For this sinful act, she would become Adam’s inferior, and subsequently all women would be forever subjugated to men.¹⁰⁹

The information that Stone presents provides food for thought. Growing up in a Christian home before converting to Islam in my teens, I remember being taught the Bible story of Adam and Eve and all that it entails. It was explained early on that women experience and endure suffering that eludes men because Eve sinned, caused Adam to sin and he was, therefore, given dominion over her. The attitude toward women wasn’t that much different when I embraced Islam. Females in religious, leadership positions were not, according to Stone’s findings, taken seriously either. Likened to present-day perceptions of strong or courageous women, they were considered “curiously masculine,”

¹⁰⁹ Stone, *When God Was a Woman*, xiii.

something of a freak or physiological abnormality.¹¹⁰ Even women who were intelligent and wise were questionable or, perhaps unbelievable, especially when compared with men. Although priestesses provided advice and counsel, their roles were downplayed. What may have been viewed as a vital and important service was minimized by dismissing it as women were suited for such roles because “as women they were more ‘intuitive’ or ‘emotional,’ thus ideal mediums for divine revelation...it has always been the women who have shown an inclination for obscure astrological cults.” Terms such as emotional and intuitive were not, and generally are not, applied to men.¹¹¹

Is a female really more emotional than a male but for what some cultures and societies say they each should be? Is the answer to that question *really* known? Perhaps woman should be honored that she is “the ideal medium for divine revelation.” That seems to say that woman is very much in touch with divine source, and that would make the whole discussion rather conflicting and contradictory. However, it could be why there is a rise in the number of women entering seminary to become ministers, and also studying to become spiritual directors. It could also be that women are reclaiming their divinely ordained place. One question that might be posed is, if woman is indeed “the ideal medium for divine revelation,” would there ever have been a valid reason for the argument to begin with?

Hinduism has been mentioned and given consideration as one of the world’s oldest and major religions that existed prior to the Abrahamic religions. It is a faith tradition that has a multitude of idols, both female and male, and it remains intact. Might

¹¹⁰ Stone, *When God was a Woman*, xxi.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, xxi.

it be possible that the matriarchal social and religious systems were destroyed and replaced by male dominant religions because of *where* they existed geographically and *where* the patriarchal religions were founded—all in the same vicinity of the Middle East?

Stone's topic and findings may very well have some validity, giving rise as to why there have been such major struggles for women, half of the world's population, in the patriarchal religions—Islam being viewed as the one that is the most extreme when it comes to inequality of the sexes, and the furthest behind when it comes to female advancement and progress. However, she is not suggesting that anyone return to the ancient, pre-Abrahamic religions. She cites Sheila Collins who said, "As women, our hope for fulfillment lies in the present and future and not in some mystical, golden past."¹¹² Stone, therefore, holds hope that humankind will use the history of ancient civilization to raise consciousness and find answers to current practices of female oppression based on patriarchal laws that were falsely founded, developed and established.

Like Stone, I am not suggesting that anyone abandon his or her current faith tradition and revert back to ancient practices that predated the Abrahamic traditions. Each faith tradition may contain some doctrine or dogma that raises dissatisfaction, doubts or questions. I converted to Islam over forty years ago. In spite of how it is perceived, it still remains the frame of reference for my spiritual and religious foundation. One's spirituality is the personal relationship with the Divine One. One's choice of religion is the vehicle that transports and connects one to the Divine Source, thereby

¹¹² Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman*, xxv.

flowering the soul and uplifting the spirit. Stone's accounts simply appear to give reason as to why the female-male relationship is what it is today—culturally, politically, socially and theologically. Her argument also supports my own—that Muhammad did not design, invent or initiate oppression of and violence against women. Such attitudes, behaviors and practices existed well over fourteen hundred years ago—the time in which Islam was founded.

Another example provides a glimpse into the past that demonstrates the presence of female-led systems that had been in place prior to Judaism and eventually replaced, even before Islam. “In Egypt the Hebrews had known...For generations they had been living in a land where women held a very high status and the matrilineal descent system...”¹¹³ The intention here is to investigate Stone's work and unpack it to shed some light on the fact that oppression and brutality of the female did not originate with Prophet Muhammad and Islam. She concentrated her research in the Middle East to find supportive evidence that matriarchal and matrilineal systems existed thousands of years before the Hebrew prophet and patriarch Abraham.¹¹⁴ This, by no means, justifies any ongoing or newly instituted mistreatment or restrictions imposed on Muslim women, but her work can invite Jews, Christians, other non-Muslims and Muslims to revisit the past, observe their own histories, discover where the ideologies and behaviors may have originated and reach some level of understanding that these attitudes and actions may indeed have more to do with patriarchal take over and less to do with Islam per se. If women had control over their own spiritual practices, clans, offspring and economic

¹¹³ Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman*, 167.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

systems, an obvious place for the patriarchs to begin would have been the destruction and replacement of the existing systems—where women drew their spiritual, socio-economic and political strength.

Another important finding was that women exercised control over the children. They belonged to her. According to Stone, Leonard Cottrell referred to anthropologists such as James Frazer, Margaret Mead and others who,

established that in the very early stages of man's development, before coitus was associated with childbirth, the female was revered as the giver of life. Only women could produce their own kind, and man's part in this process was not yet recognized...Thus the concepts of paternity and fatherhood would not yet have been understood.¹¹⁵

Since babies were born from women, they took the name of the mother's tribe or clan, whereby the family could be kept through the female line from mother to daughter instead of from father to son.

While Stone's work was published in 1976, twenty-four years earlier, in 1952, another published work by Muhammad Mazheruddin Saddipi stated:

no man or woman is permitted to remain alone with a member of the opposite sex except his or her partner, but women who have passed the age of child bearing or those with whom, owing to intimate blood-relationship.¹¹⁶

The phrase, "but women who have passed the age of child bearing" raises two questions: Is it sexual relations that are of utmost concern, or is it certainty of paternity that is more important here? Might it be the assumption or practice that women who have passed childbearing age are no longer interested in sexual relations, or are no longer considered suitable partners because they can no longer produce offspring?

¹¹⁵ Stone, *When God Was a Woman*, 11.

¹¹⁶ Muhammad Mazheruddin Siddiqi, *Women in Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: The Institute for Islamic Culture, 1951), 105.

Amina Wadud follows thirty years after Stone with relevant information that pertains to the uncertainty of paternity during the pre-Islamic period. The child's progeny could only be proven through the woman. There was no means available to determine with certainty the paternity of a child. The lineage was adhered to through the female line. The care and support of the children in early Arabia revolved around the female, "An Islamic ideal evolved to grant equal protection to the fathers' paternal rights as biology had protected the mothers' rights to claim their children. Attempting mutual maternity rights could have been the basis for the construction of some aspects in Islamic law, like the prohibition of polyandry."¹¹⁷ Although Wadud does not mention the Abrahamic faiths that preceded Islam, her findings are in agreement with the anthropological findings that precede her data.

Apparently, our ancient female ancestors not only bore children and held charge over them; they had control over their own lives through economic independence. That could very well have been perceived by males as too much power for women. Stone quotes W. Schnidt who cited Joseph Campbell as having said that women in early cultures showed themselves supreme. They not only bore offspring, but they were also producers of food. They had economic and social power and prestige.¹¹⁸ Apparently, men had to change the plan.

Once the Hebrews wiped out the earlier customs, it was time to put their policies into practice by any means necessary. The Levite priests set forth laws for the Israelites from the time of Moses, which demanded virginity until marriage for all women. Once

¹¹⁷ Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad* (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 132-133.

¹¹⁸ Stone, 19.

married, only the wife had to adhere to total fidelity. If either law was broken, the punishment was death by stoning or burning.¹¹⁹ Had she known or thought of it, Idliby, of the Faith Club, could have used this example to educate Warner and Oliver, and also to substantiate that stoning of women originated with the Levite laws of the Israelites, the Hebrews of Judaism, and followed through by the Christians before Islam came into being.

Lack of compliance was not going to be tolerated. Those who defied the new rules would pay dearly—even the ultimate price. “Jezebel was murdered in the most gruesome manner, described in morbid detail in the Bible. She was used as an example and a warning to any disobeying or potentially disobeying women.”¹²⁰ Noncompliance or deviation was sin, punishable by a disgraceful and excruciating death sentence.¹²¹ The once free woman and mother, financially independent and stable, had to mend her ways and play by a new set of rules. If she wanted to live, she could no longer claim or own herself. In the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 22:20-22:-

But if this thing be true and tokens of virginity not found for the damsel: then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father’s house and the men of the city shall stone her with stones that she die because she hath wrought folly in Israel to play the whore in her father’s house, so shall thou put away evil from among you.¹²²

Granted, the violent measures that are applied to maintain control of women and uphold the rule of law in some present-day Islamic societies are extreme and distorted interpretations of Islam and the Quran. Yet, very little is ever discussed or even heard of

¹¹⁹ Stone, 188-190.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 188.

¹²¹ Ibid., 190.

¹²² Ibid., 167

when it comes to non-Muslim women and where the practices originated. In addition, some may deceive themselves into thinking or believing that violence against women and lack of rights are non-existent in the Western and non-Islamic world. It takes only the turning of a newspaper page or the pressing of the remote control to realize that such is not the case. Date rape, gang rape, sneak-attack rape and domestic violence are prevalent in the United States and other parts of the world.

As for the Levites and their new laws in place, the male could then rule completely and strictly through continued force. Without control over all women, men could not claim ownership of name, property and divine right to rule.¹²³ Most assuredly, the story of Eve continues to affect the female population, worldwide, to this day—in seemingly benign, subtle and brutal ways. “We may indeed find the seemingly innocent myth of Paradise and how the world began was actually carefully constructed and propagated to keep women in their place, the place assigned to them by the Levite tribe of biblical Canaan.”¹²⁴

Often, the men go unpunished in Islamic and non-Islamic countries because in such societies males wield the power in the judicial systems, believing it’s their divine right to have power over women, “the second-class citizen,” under any and all circumstances. “Even today Hebrew males are taught to offer the daily prayer, “Blessed Art Thou O Lord God, King of the Universe, who has not made me a woman.”¹²⁵

Stone implies that, by writing the ‘in the beginning story,’ describing the defiance and disobedience of Eve and her seduction of Adam, the Levite priests were also defying

¹²³Stone, 192.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 197.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 224.

the existence of all that had taken place before them. “when they could not convert, the Levite priesthood wrote the tale of creation. They announced that male supremacy was not a new idea, but in fact had been divinely decreed...At the very dawn of existence...with blatant disregard for history.” Therefore, “woman must be ruled by man” even to the extent that the children, especially the male children, could no longer be claimed by her. In the book of Ezekiel “This application, ‘Son of man,’ was used throughout...perhaps to remind its readers that the Levite priests, such as Ezekiel, no longer considered themselves sons of women.”¹²⁶ These findings that explain male dominance, beginning with the Levite priests, are quite extensive. They go on to mention that first the Christians and then the Muslims followed up and followed through on the story of “in the beginning,” and the establishment of male power, male rights and male supremacy.

Jesus, the Christ was born a Hebrew. He brought forth the message of the Gospel as evidenced in the New Testament. He, like the prophets Abraham and Moses before him, had followers and disciples who became converts. In their effort to be Christ like, they became Christians—followers of the Christ. Early on, while they were advocated their message, the persecuted, also became the persecutors—similar to the Levite priesthood and Hebrews before them: “Clement of Alexandria reproduces a saying from *The Gospel according to the Egyptians*. Christ’s words are interesting and in such a context they are almost certainly directed against the current worship of Isis: ‘I have come to destroy the works of the female.’”¹²⁷ Jesus, the Christ carried forth the actions

¹²⁶ Stone, 187.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 194.

and teachings of the messengers before him—Abraham and Moses. The Hebrew story of creation was incorporated into the sacred text of Christianity.¹²⁸ In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians we read, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord” (Eph. 5:22-24). In the fifth century, St. Augustine claimed that man, not woman was created in God’s image, and that woman is incomplete without man, but man is complete alone.¹²⁹ Christians also followed through on the requirement for female chastity. Because of the defect in the formation of the first woman who was created from a bent rib and because of her imperfections. “Women are to be chaste and sub servant to men.”¹³⁰

The Levite priests obliterated the matriarchal and matrilineal systems, and usurped female autonomy; and the Christian advocates of the Gospel took her voice. The New Testament reads:

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach or to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed and then Eve (Timothy 2:11-14).¹³¹

For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. Let the woman keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, so saith the law. And if they learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. (1 Corinthians 11:3,7,9)¹³²

Today, there are Christian women who hold titles of pastor, associate pastor, assistant pastor, bishop, minister and preacher. In some churches and ministries, women

¹²⁸ Stone, 224.

¹²⁹ Ibid.,226.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Stone, 6.

¹³² Ibid, 6, 7.

co-pastor with their husbands. Christian women have made many advances. So have Jewish women, their sisters of the Abrahamic faith of Judaism that precedes them. Like Jesus, the Christ before him, the Prophet Muhammad took up the cause. Many in Western society do not realize that

Muhammad incorporated many of the legends and attitudes of the Old and New Testaments into the Muslim Koran, the bible of Islam... the Koran of the Mohammadans was quite clear. In it we read, "Allah will not tolerate idolatry...the pagans pray to females". [I]n the Koran, Sura 4:31 tells us, "Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. So, good women are obedient."¹³³

Also, Muhammad said, "when Eve was created, Satan rejoiced."¹³⁴

Summarizing some of the possible root causes for male dominance in the Abrahamic traditions that somehow lays most of the blame on Islam, the Hebrew male thanks God, to this day, that he was not made a woman; In the gospel of the Egyptians, Jesus, the Christ said that he came to destroy the works of the female, and Muhammad stated that the creation of Eve gave Satan cause to rejoice. Such attitudes and views of women have been carried out over centuries in all three of the Abrahamic traditions that have, in turn, caused many sufferings and restrictions placed upon women. Judaism and Christianity have instituted reforms that allow women to assume greater leadership roles in the overall community and the religious arena. Such is slowly taking place in Islam. Change is not coming as a result of altering the faith, but rather from that which will achieve balance through interpretation of the Quran as it pertains to the rights of women, dispelling the distortions of the faith—similar to ways in which Judaism and Christianity must have undergone to arrive at their current reforms. Before any or all blame is placed

¹³³ Stone, *When God was a Woman*, 195.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 224.

on Islam for the problems that Muslim women face, let all of Abraham's children take a step back in history and acquaint themselves with the events of the times that predate Judaism, Christianity and, especially, Islam—the youngest of the three faiths which follows through on many of Abraham's messages.

Beginning with a closer look at the Quran, the hadith and what some Islamic scholars and theologians have to say will shed brighter light on the rights of women in Islam. Shaykh Jamal Rahman, a Muslim from Bangladesh and a Sufi interfaith minister and spiritual director, says that it is necessary for the Muslim community to return to the sacred values of the Quran and the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad “so that man might incline with love towards woman” (7:189). He views the Prophet as a role model because he was a good husband and “a radical feminist centuries before the term was coined.” He also mentions the eighth century Sufi saint Rabia who encountered men boasting that the Prophethood was granted to man, not woman. Rabia reminded them that such arrogance does not arise from women, but is the specialty of men.¹³⁵

When asked, “Do women in Islam have gender equality with men,” Shaykh Dr. Ibrahim Abdul-Malik responded with references to Karen Armstrong and the Quran: In seventh century, pre-Islamic society, most women were second-class citizens who lived under the dominance and oppression of men without resource. Before Prophet Muhammad they were excluded from their rightful inheritance.¹³⁶ There are several examples in the Quran concerning equality, inheritance and earnings that apply to both genders—without ambiguity: On equality: Regarding that of the women who follow the

¹³⁵Jamal Rahman, *Out of Darkness Into Light*, 69.

¹³⁶ Shaykh Dr. Ibrahim Abdul-Malik, *Islam & Muslims: Twenty-Five Questions and Answers* (New York: Imams Council of New York, 2007), 20-21.

tenets of Islam the same as the men, “for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward (Ali, Al-Ahzah, 33:35).¹³⁷

Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf poses a very strong argument regarding equal rights and leadership positions held by women in Islam. Often asked, by Americans, questions about the rights of women in Islam, he responds with the reminder that Muslim nations have elected women heads of state in some of the most populated Islamic countries. He, in turn, poses the question: “Could one agree, then that the United States lags behind the Muslim world in granting equal rights to women—and that the reason America has never had a female president is because of its Judeo-Christian ethic?”¹³⁸ His statement and question make sense up to a point, but the fact that there are or have been Muslim women as heads of state in Muslim countries does not mean that inequality or mistreatment of Muslim do not exist any more than it means there is no racism in America because Barack Housein Obama is president of these United States. Like racism, gender equality in the Islamic community still has to be addressed.

While Rauf made the point of female Muslim heads of state, Christine Huda Dodge names the women who have held executive leadership positions in several Islamic countries: the late Benazir Bhutto (Prime Minister of Pakistan), Begum Kalida Zia (Prime Minister of Bangladesh), Sheikh Hasina (Prime Minister of Bangladesh), Mega Wati Sukarnoputri (President of Indonesia), Mussumeh Ebtekar (Vice President of Iran), and Tansu Ciller (Prime Minister of Turkey).¹³⁹ The imam, Rauf, makes another very

¹³⁷ Shaykh Dr. Ibrahim Abdul-Malik, *Islam & Muslims*, 21.

¹³⁸ Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, *What’s Right with Islam: A New Version for Muslims and the West* (New York: HarperCollins Publications, Inc. 2004), 217.

¹³⁹ Christine Huda Dodge, *The Everything Understanding Islam Book*, 272.

important point that should not be overlooked. It is that customs and traditions of different national and ethnic cultures have been brought to Islam as it spread outside of Saudi Arabia—much in the same way that it has occurred in Judaism and Christianity.¹⁴⁰

Indeed an important issue that needs to be addressed is: women in leadership positions—whether or not Muslim women can hold positions of status or leadership roles in political, social and religious settings such as heads of state, imams and business women, especially in mix gendered arenas. It has been previously mentioned that at least four Islamic nations have had female heads of state. Women in Islam can indeed hold positions of status, prominence and leadership. They do so today and, contrary to what is believed and perceived, they held important positions in the early days of Islam. A number of them were the Prophet's wives, of whom there were at least thirteen. Their names were: Khadijah bint Kuwaylid; Sauda bint Zama; Aishah bint Abi Bakr; Hafsa bint Umar; Zainab bint Khuzayma; Hind bint Abi Umayya aka Umm Salma; Zainab bint Jahsh; Juwairiya bint al Harith; Ramlah bint Abi Sufyan aka Umm Habibah; Raihana bint Zayd; Safiyya bint Huyayy; Maymuna bint al Harith, and Marie al Qibtiyya aka Mary the Coft.¹⁴¹

The most famous of Muhammad's wives was his first wife, Khadijah and his youngest wife, Aishah. After those two, Umm Salma or Salamah and Asma (aka Raihana) are also mentioned. Esposito speaks of Muslim women in the early days of Islam and specifically of the Prophet's wives, Khadijah and Aishah. Women held prominent positions and played important roles in early Islam and in the life of

¹⁴⁰ Abdul Rauf, *New Version for Muslims and the West*, 217.

¹⁴¹ John L. Esposito, 14.

Muhammad. Muhammad's wife Khadijah was the first to learn of the Quranic revelation. She was a business woman who first hired him and later proposed to him. As a result, jurists recommended that women could propose to men. Women fought in wars and attended the wounded. They also took part in the procedure of choosing a successor to the Prophet upon his death. They contributed to the compilation of the Quran and in the transmission of numerous hadith (prophetic traditions). In addition, women prayed regularly along with men in the mosque, providing evidence of equality in public life during the early period of Islam. Women bought, owned and sold property; indulged in business transactions and were involved in educational pursuit and instruction. Many were involved in religious matters in the home of the Prophet. His daughter Fatima played a prominent role in his community, and his young wife Aisha also played a unique role as an authority on history, medicine, poetry and rhetoric. She was also one of the most important transmitters of hadith.¹⁴² Aishah is not only quoted in the hadith, she is also spoken of very highly in that text:

Abu Musa said: We God's messenger's companions, never asked Aisha about a tradition regarding which we were in doubt without finding that she had some knowledge of it.¹⁴³

Musa b. Talha said he had seen no one whose speech was more chaste than Aisha's.¹⁴⁴

Armstrong also mentions Aisha as "Muhammad's beloved young wife" and Um Salamah "as one of the most sophisticated and intelligent of Muhammad's wives."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² John L. Esposito, *Everyone Needs to Know*, 93-95.

¹⁴³ James Robson, *Mishkat al-Masabih (hadith)*, English Translation with Explanatory Notes, Volume 1 (Kashmiri Bazar, Lahore, Pakistan: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1973), 1362.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Times* (New York,: HarperCollins, 2006), 223 and 228.

The aforementioned are clear examples of the high esteem in which the Prophet's first wife, Khadijah and young wife, Aishah were held. When Aishah was given to Muhammad, she was too young to consummate the marriage. When she reached proper age, she ended up being his favorite wife after Khadijah died. It was in her arms that he drew his last breath. Khadijah, was about twenty years older than Muhammad and was already an established business woman. Karen Armstrong elaborates:

Khadijah was a remarkable woman, 'determined, noble and intelligent,' says Ibn Ishaq, Muhammad's first biographer. She was the first to recognize her husband's genius, and... he relied on her advice and support. After her death, he used to infuriate some of his later wives by endlessly singing her praises.¹⁴⁶

One of Muhammad's praises of Khadijah is mentioned in the hadith:

Ali told that he heard God's messenger say, 'The best woman of her time was Mary daughter of Imran (*the Virgin Mary*) and the best woman of her time is Khadijah daughter of Khuwallid.'¹⁴⁷

In his 2009 publication, *Forensic Scriptures*, Brian Arthur Brown reports that it is becoming more evident that women were involved in the recording of the Quran; that the early surahs written in Mecca were transcribed by women in Muhammad's household, especially the well educated Khadijah who came from a Christian family where literacy was higher at that time. Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, and some of the other wives were scribes in Medina.¹⁴⁸

One woman held in high esteem during the period of early Islam includes Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba, which was one of the early names of Ethiopia. The late Emperor

¹⁴⁶ Armstrong, *Prophet for Our Times*, 37-38.

¹⁴⁷ Robson, *Mishkat*, 1360.

¹⁴⁸ Brian Arthur Brown, *Forensic Scriptures: Critical Analysis of Scripture and What the Quran Reveals about the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 123, 196.

Haile Salasi, claimed lineage to Bilqis and King Solomon through their offspring, King Menelik of Ethiopia. Stone states that the anthropologist G. Landes had written back in 1961 that “Queens such as the Queen of Sheba (about 950 BC), at times led Arab states or tribes.”¹⁴⁹ Of Bilqis, Esposito writes that women had the right to serve as judges, and the Quran upholds the leadership of the Queen of Sheba as a positive example (27:23-44), “highlighting her ability to carry out the duties of her office, her piety, her sound judgment and her political prowess.”¹⁵⁰ The Quran says of this beautiful, powerful wealthy queen: “And I have drawn near to **you** from Sheba with certain tidings” (27:22). “Truly I found a woman controlling them. And she was given everything and for her **is** a sublime throne” (27:23).¹⁵¹

Other women in early Islam include female Sufi saints—one of the most popularly quoted for her poetry and sayings, is Rabia. First, it is important to clarify the meaning of the word saint as it is used in Islam or Sufism. Esposito explains that because the Quran warns against seeking help from anyone but God, the word saint in Arabic is somewhat equivalent to the Arabic word wali, meaning a patron, friend or helper. Such beliefs and practices as intercession violate monotheism by treating saints as if they were equal to God. Most saints are Sufi saints of whom many are remembered for their miracles and wise sayings. A number of the Sufi saints are women.¹⁵² Shaykh Jamal Rahman’s earlier reference to Rabia mentioned her response to boastful men: “but

¹⁴⁹Stone, *When God Was a Woman*, 55.

¹⁵⁰ Esposito, 95.

¹⁵¹ Laleh Baktiar, *The Sublime Quran: English Translation* (Chicago, IL: Library of Islam, 2009), 333.

¹⁵² Esposito, 21.

egoism and self worship and ‘I am your Lord most high’ never sprung from a woman’s breast. All those have been the specialty of men.”¹⁵³ Apparently, Rabia was not shaken by the male ego, and she usually responded with a wise saying that was delivered in a kind and loving manner. Ruqaiyyah Waris Maqsood speaks of her assets stating that Rabia was not the first representative of female Sufism, but she was the most famous. She is known as the founder of Sufi love-mysticism, a teacher and a specialist in jurisprudence.¹⁵⁴ Karen Armstrong captures the essence of Rabia, thus,

Where the Quran described a God of strict justice, Sufis such as the great woman ascetic Rabia (d.801), spoke of a God of love.¹⁵⁵

The discussion of prominent women in early Islam would be for naught if not to mention a female imam. Amina Wadud, well known for being the first woman to lead the Friday prayer in a New York City mosque, at a mix gendered congregation, refers to Um Waraqa, a woman who was designated as one to lead prayer—by the Prophet Muhammad. The importance of this fact goes without saying:

a Muslim male has always been the public prayer leader, *imam* and the one who delivers the obligatory *khutbah*, sermon that precedes the prayer when both women and men congregate. The single notable exception to this practice historically was when the Prophet Muhammad assigned Umm Waraqa as **imamah**, in her *dar*, community or household.¹⁵⁶

It is also important to know and understand the meaning of the word, imam. It means “teacher” and “in front of other worshippers during prayers.”¹⁵⁷ Those who support approval of female imams refer to the Prophet’s companion Umm Waraqa.

¹⁵³ Rahman, *Out of Darkness into Light*, 69.

¹⁵⁴ Maqsood, *Teach Yourself Islam* (London, England: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 265.

¹⁵⁵ Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short Story* (New York: Random House, Inc. 2002), 74.

¹⁵⁶ Amina Wadud, *Gender Jihad*, 265.

¹⁵⁷ Dodge, *Islam Book*, 89.

Prophet Muhammad ordered her to lead the prayers in her community, which included men. While some use this example to support the claim that women can lead men in prayer, most scholars regard it as invalid because it was a privilege given to Um Waraqa and not to other women.¹⁵⁸ Clearly a weak argument.

As demonstrated, there were a number of women who held important and prominent positions during the time of the Prophet. Therefore, it cannot be said that he advocated the severe restrictions and oppressive behaviors that are heard of and witnessed today. These are the reasons why today's women in Islam are stepping forward in their quest to have their voices heard. There are also progressive Muslim men who support the cause. Where there is a freer and more open environment in North America and Europe, advocacy for reform is more prevalent. Muslim scholars and activists such as Amina Wadud of Virginia Commonwealth University, author of *Quran and Woman*; Amira el-Azhary Sonbol of Georgetown University, an expert on women and law—both reside and practice their professions in the United States. Tariq Ramadan, male Islamic scholar from South Africa, resides in Europe.¹⁵⁹

Many modern-day Muslims—feminist, progressive female and male, no longer think that women and men have to be separated to the extent of cloistering women, placing walls and curtains between them and men or completely covering them so that they see the outside world only through mesh coverings over their faces. Esposito says that today's opinions vary when it comes to separation of the sexes, especially since women now play an important role in mosques other than to attend and pray. They teach

¹⁵⁸ Maqsood, *Teach Yourself Islam*, 312-313.

¹⁵⁹ Esposito, 66.

classes in Quran and function in other roles such as leading auxiliaries and holding office. Advocates for female and male equality argue that times have changed. Therefore, the Quran has to be investigated, analyzed and reinterpreted so that clearer and deeper meaning can be derived for the words, written centuries ago; can be updated for the world we reside in today—the twenty-first century.¹⁶⁰ “It does not say that women are incapable of managing their own affairs....or being leaders...God’s expressed preference for certain individuals in the Quran is based upon their faith, not their gender...Reformers further argue that gender equality is the intended order established by God, because God does not make distinctions based upon gender in matters of faith.”¹⁶¹

The privileges and rights that applied to women during the Prophet’s time should still apply today. Instead of reverting back to pre Islamic practices, the Islamic community should take pride in the advances that Prophet Muhammad introduced on behalf of women. If his reforms, which are considered revolutionary today, were still practiced up to now, there really would be no need for major reform. Minor adjustments would update women’s rights to meet the modern age. While there are a number of Muslim women in history who served as successful role models for today’s women in Islam, there are quite a number of Muslim women who are active in politics and education throughout the modern world. In many Islamic countries, women make up the majority of college and graduate students, and many women can retain their family name upon marriage as an act that the female remains her own person and maintains her own identity.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Esposito, *Know About Islam*, 88-89.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 90-91.

¹⁶² Dodge, *Islam Book*, 197.

Even though rights were given to male and female alike in early Islam, equality continues to be at odds for the female—in some cases, completely eluding her. There are, however, a number of modern-day Muslim women who are in roles that demonstrate their abilities and qualities for leadership, which simultaneously advocate for gender equality. They are making sure that the feminine voice is heard in all areas where that voice is necessary—ethically, historically, politically, socially, scripturally and theologically.

Geneive Abdo defines herself as an Arab American.¹⁶³ She is an author and journalist and has traveled across the United States, visiting Islamic communities, mosques and centers. She has reported some of her findings in her book, *Mecca and Main Street* (2006), which concerns women's issues in Islam, clashes between Islamic schools of thought, and friction between African American and immigrant Muslims. The latter can be a thesis unto itself.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a Somali-born Muslim woman who has spoken out against Islamic fundamentalism and Islamic misogyny. She expresses her opinions and perspectives in her book, *Infidel* (2007). Before coming to the United States, she lived in exile in the Netherlands. She and her Dutch colleague, Theo Van Gogh, made a film together entitled *Submission Part 1*, about Muslim women who question God regarding the brutal conditions under which many of them live. Van Gogh was murdered in 2004 by an Islamic fundamentalist, and Hirsi Ali had to live with bodyguards up to the time her Dutch neighbors asked her to leave their community because they felt unsafe with her in their presence. She fled to the United States. Her film obviously enraged the Muslim

¹⁶³ Geneive Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street: Muslim Life in America after 9/11* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc. 2006), 10.

male who believes that a woman is not only to submit totally to Allah, but to all males as well.¹⁶⁴

Laleh Bakhtiar grew up in the United States as the daughter of a Christian American mother. Her father, an Iranian, lived in Iran. She visited Iran at the age of twenty-four, accompanied by her husband and children. She was assumed Muslim because her father was. She confessed, “I don’t know anything about Islam.” She was told, “Well, learn.” She studied classical Arabic. She is the translator of *The Sublime Quran :English Translation*. It is a wonderful gift for the non-Arabic speaking Muslim—a global group who far outnumber the Arab and Middle Eastern Muslim community. Ms. Bakhtiar’s format might be considered a user-friendly concordance of the Quran.¹⁶⁵

Benazir Bhutto, the late, twice-elected Prime Minister of Pakistan, was a beloved figure in her homeland. She was not assassinated because she was a woman. In her effort to restore democracy, she was a threat to the opposition. She was from a well-to-do family, and she was fortunate to have a Muslim father, Ali Bhutto, who encouraged her to achieve academically and politically. Her father had been Prime Minister before her and he was hung on April 4 (1979).¹⁶⁶ Ms. Bhutto returned to Pakistan to run for Prime Minister for a third term. Her homecoming was considered a historic return to Karachi on October 18, 2007, which attracted three million supporters to greet her. Her

¹⁶⁴ Ayann Hirsi Ali, *Infidel* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2007), xi.

¹⁶⁵ Laleh Bakhtiar, *The Sublime Quran*, xx.

¹⁶⁶ Libby Hughes, *Benazir Bhutto: From Prison to Prime Minister* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, Inc., 1990), 57.

popularity resulted in the curtailment of her movement and she was placed under house arrest by the Musharraf regime. She was assassinated on December 27, 2007.¹⁶⁷

Shaykha Fariha Al-Jerrahi is the leader of the Nur Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order and the Masjid al-Farah in New York City. She “was born into a socially committed, eclectic Catholic family in Houston, Texas.” She studied under Lex Hixon (Shaykh Nur al-Jerrahi) and, following his death, took over the role of guide of the order.¹⁶⁸

Ingrid Mattson is a woman of Canadian background who converted to Islam from the Catholic faith. She is a professor of Islamic history at Hartford Seminary. In a 2006 New York Times article it was announced that she “was elected president of the Islamic Society of North America, the largest umbrella organization for Muslim groups in the United States and Canada. She is both the first woman and, as a Canadian, the first non-immigrant to hold the post.”¹⁶⁹ Described in a Newsweek article (October, 2007) as a “white Canadian,” Mattson said in a New York Times article,

Somehow there is the feeling that someone who is white is safer and less scary...but I am who I am. So if there is some social capital that I can use counteract some of the negative perception and open ears to what we have to say as a community, then that is a benefit.¹⁷⁰

Professor Mattson is the author of *The Story of the Quran* and numerous articles and papers on the history of the Quran and women’s issues, one being, *Can A Woman Be An Imam?* Since, “She’s also encouraging mosques to hire more female imams and

¹⁶⁷ Benazir Bhutto, *Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy, and the West* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), vii-viii.

¹⁶⁸ Shaykha Fariha al Jerrahi, *Tending the Holy*, 212.

¹⁶⁹ Neil MacFarquhar, “Putting a Different Face On Islam in America,” *The New York Times*, 20 September 2006, B1 and B8.

¹⁷⁰ Neil MacFarquhar, “Different Face On Islam in America. ”

pushing women in her classes to be more assertive,” the answer to the question would be affirmative.¹⁷¹ Um Waraqa, the imamah during early Islam, was mentioned earlier.

Dr. Aminah McCloud is an expert on Islam and Muslim communities. She is an African American who converted to Islam in 1966. In an article that she wrote for Cross Currents magazine, she also mentions, as does Geneive Abdo (the Arab American), the conflict between African American and immigrant Muslims.¹⁷² Aminah Beverly McCloud has the credentials, the experience and the knowledge to be the excellent spokesperson that she is: an Associate Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at DePaul University; the author of four books and over twenty articles about a wide range of subjects, such as Islamic Law and Muslim women; a Fulbright Scholar; and Islamic Legal Expert, and currently managing editor of the journal of Islamic Law and Culture; founder of the Islam in America Conference at DePaul University which houses the Journal of Islamic Law and Culture and the Islam in America Archives; a member of the Centre for Islamic Studies in Oxford; a board member of Iqra Foundation, and a board member of “The Healing Project” at Boston University Hospital; consultant for various encyclopedia projects on Muslims in America and Islam, and the recipient of the 2005 Dr. Betty Shabazz Award. The late Dr. Shabazz was the widow of El Hajj Malik El Shabazz (Malcolm X).¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Sarah Childress, Ingrid Mattson “Islam: Raised Catholic, This Muslim Professor is Bringing the Moderate Viewpoint to the World,” *Newsweek*, October 15, 2007.

¹⁷² *Exploring Tensions within America’s Muslim Community* (United States: Frontline.wgbh.pbsi), web site copyright 1995-2005.

¹⁷³ Aminah McCloud: Recipient of the 2005 Dr. Betty Shabazz Award (Women in Islam, Inc.: Dr. Betty Shabazz Memoriam Lecture Award Ceremony), <http://www.womeninislam.org>. (accessed March 22, 2010).

Fatima Mernissi, a Muslim feminist from the 1970's, is mentioned in Sherman Jackson's book, *Islam and the Blackamerican*. According to Jackson, Mernissi, Moroccan born, traveled and lived throughout the Muslim and Arab world and became well acquainted with the rigid class divisions and social stratification that characterized Muslim societies. "As a feminist, she was actually aware of the inequality affecting women, as well as the color discrimination, alive and well in the Muslim world."¹⁷⁴

Raheel Raza is Director for Interfaith Affairs of the SnowStar Institute in Canada. She is considered a progressive Muslim feminist. She was born in Pakistan and migrated to Canada twenty years ago. In a magazine interview she shares that she was born in a Muslim family in Pakistan where she became a Muslim by rote—without really understanding what the faith stands for or what the prayers mean because they are in Arabic which is not her mother tongue. She grew up in a culture where women were supposed to be seen and not heard, but she rebelled at an early age.¹⁷⁵ Raza is also known as a leading Muslim reformer, award winning writer, professional speaker, diversity consultant, documentary film maker and interfaith advocate. She is the author of *Their Jihad...Not My Jihad*. As a participant in the May 15-17, 2009 Forensic Scriptures Conference, held at Riverside Church in New York City, Brian Arthur Brown, author of *The Forensic Scriptures*, listed her in the program for the Friday Evening Introductory Session as "Canadian Muslim womanist, Raheel Raza leads Isha's prayers in a mixed-gender, interfaith context." At that conference, Raza invited me to chant the Adhan, call

¹⁷⁴ Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Towards the Third Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 26.

¹⁷⁵ Jamie Glazov, "A Leading Muslim Feminist Discusses Her Faith—and Her Battle Against Islamic Extremism" *Frontpage Magazine*, November 11, 2008.

to prayer. Two precedents may have been set that evening as it is not customary for women to chant the Adhan or lead prayer in a public, mixed-gender gathering.

Amina Wadud, Ph.D. was the first known Muslim woman to lead a mixed-gender prayer (jum'ah prayer) in public—before Raheel Raza did so in May, 2009. *Muslim WakeUp!*, which is listed as “The Most Popular Muslim Online Magazine,” placed the following announcement:

Muslim Wakeup! And the Muslim Women's Freedom Tour are proud to sponsor The First Muslim Woman on Record to Lead a Public Mixed-Gender Juma'ah Prayer.¹⁷⁶

Naseeb Vibes, “The Largest Muslim E-Zine,” mentions in the Editor's Note:

Dr. Amina Wadud...whose decision to lead Jummah on March 18, 2005 has caused awareness about the movement world-wide, but threats of violence against her and the congregation have led organizers to move the event to a discrete location..¹⁷⁷

Dr. Wadud, who placed herself in great danger that day, is also an African American who converted to Islam. She is another exemplary Muslim woman convert who has gone through the rigors of study to arrive at her prominent status in the Islamic world community. She is: a controversial feminist and scholar; received her Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, and during graduate school, studied Arabic in Egypt at the American University in Cairo, Cairo University, and Al-Azhar University; achieved Full Professor of Islamic Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond Virginia; was an Assistant Professor at the International Islamic University Malaysia; research specialties include gender and Quranic studies; wrote a book, *Qu'ran and*

¹⁷⁶ “Friday Prayer Led by Dr. Amina Wadud,” *Muslim WakeUp!* March 18, 2005, muslimwakeup.com. (accessed March 22, 2010)

¹⁷⁷ Dr. Amina Wadud, *Spiritual Equals, Please Stand Up* (Naseeb Vibes—The Largest Muslim E-Zine, March 15, 2003).

Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective, which continues to be used all over the world as a basic text for activists and academics alike; honors speaking engagements at universities and other gatherings through the United States and globally. Her latest book, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* was published in 2006.

Asra Q. Nomani should not go without mention. A write up in the *Pakistan Times* details her background, position and status. She helped to organize the female-led Friday prayer on March 18, 2005. She said: "We are standing up for our rights as women in Islam. We will no longer accept the back door or the shadows." She is a Muslim woman who was born in India and grew up in the United States; she is a descendant of Maulana Shibfi Nomani. An author and former *Wall Street Journal* reporter, Nomani said that her objective was to draw attention to the inequality for women in Muslim spiritual life and Muslim life in general. Viewed as a controversial figure, she has drawn media attention in America for her persistent and repeated acts to sit amongst the men in the mosques, as well as her repeated resistance to sit among the women when ordered to do so.¹⁷⁸

The eleven well-educated, dynamic and courageous Muslim women of the modern world who are profiled here are but a fraction of those who go unmentioned. Many of these women are devoted wives and mothers as well as devotees to their faith. They educate through journalistic and literary publications, as well as the academic arena and professional settings; they function in the capacities of social and political leaders; and they are interpreters of Quranic scripture and Islamic jurisprudence. Most

¹⁷⁸ "Woman led Friday prayer sparks controversy in the US," *Pakistan Times—Foreign Desk*, <http://pakistantimes.net/2005/03/20/top10.htm> (accessed March 14, 2010).

importantly, each in her own way, by performing effectively in her role of choice and setting an exemplary example, is not only demonstrating that gender is not an issue and dispelling the perceptions held, but is also dismantling the barriers that have kept her and other Muslim women, for the most part, outside of religious and spiritual leadership in the mix gendered arenas.

Looking toward the future, more Muslim women will assume the role of imamah, teacher that was delegated to Umm Waraqa by the Prophet Muhammad during the early period of Islam, and more will perform the role of imamah that was taken on by Amina Wadud and Raheel Raza—in mix gendered gatherings, and without protest. In addition, more Muslim women will take on the roles currently held by Shaykh Jamal Rahman—those of shaykhas, interfaith ministers and spiritual directors.

CHAPTER 5

MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

The previous chapter explored the issue of women in Islam in some broad and specific terms. It did so because the perception of Muslim women is that of women who have no rights, who cannot take on leadership roles within or outside of the Islamic community. While it is true that many Muslim women have, over the centuries, lived their lifetimes entirely within the Islamic *ummah*, (community), there were those in the time of the Prophet Muhammad who not only had rights, but also assumed leadership positions of high rank. While it is true that many Muslim women also live within strict boundaries today, there are many who also hold important leadership positions within and outside of the Islamic community.

One of my goals (Goal 1) was to examine my spiritual journey by reflecting upon my location (childhood beginnings), my early position (thoughts and views on Christianity and what led up to my conversion to Islam), and what led up to my current position on interfaith, multifaith and interspiritual relations in general, and including spiritual direction in particular. This goal was met by revisiting my past and bringing to the surface that which results in the person I am today.

My strategies were carried out as I examined my Islamic beliefs and found resources to strengthen and sustain them—assisting me in remaining faithful to God and my beliefs, all of which helps me to be an effective spiritual director; examined what led up to my interest in interfaith and multifaith, and to use what I recall from my spiritual journey whatever may be helpful in my approach to spiritual direction in a multifaith context. I thought that this examination of my spiritual journey would be crucial to my understanding of the interfaith and multifaith process of spiritual direction and beneficial to the directees and myself as well. My early curiosity about different religions turned out to be an interest that led me to studies that put me in contact with many others who are different from me—others with whom I'd like to build bridges of understanding and peace.

As a Muslim woman, my religious and spiritual life has been atypical. I do not fit the profile of what most Americans, and people in general, expect a Muslim woman to fit. The best way for me to explore the multifaith reality that I work from and within is to follow the story of my own life and my own spiritual journey, in order to uncover the dimensions and dynamics at hand.

So much more besides religion makes up one's spiritual journey. Perhaps it all begins at conception and the time within the womb, before the individual enters earth's atmosphere. It involves the parents that one is born to; the race, ethnicity and culture that one joins and yes, also the religion. It would seem that geographical location, class and interrelationships with parents, family and all others play major parts as to how one individual functions and relates during his or her time spent on this planet.

One begins at a particular location upon his natal entry, to growing up with family and gradually moving forward to an introduction to the world outside of the home. From this point onwards, everyone and everything places each person in a cycle of constant change. It is an evolutionary process, with everything having a deeper spiritual meaning. In spiritual direction circles it is quite often said, “Everything in life is spiritual, and everything spiritual is life.” That implies that we are all on a spiritual journey whether or not we are aware of it. As noted earlier, the Quran states: “Witness how all affairs incline towards God.” Thomas Hart, theologian and therapist, states that “Everything that is going on in your life is grist for the mysterious open-ended creative process.”¹⁷⁹ Sally Taylor, practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism says that “Your whole life is your spiritual life...you need not be limited to meditation...specific practice and texts.”¹⁸⁰

Perhaps it should come as no surprise to me that, after a working career of nursing for more than three decades, I would decide to become an interfaith minister and spiritual director. Maybe, through Divine intervention, it was decided for me because it was never something that I had ever given thought to—not until about five years ago, and I am surprised; in fact, awed. However, a number of friends have told me that they are not surprised. They have said that they saw it coming. I don’t know what makes them say that or, for that matter, what they saw. I can only speculate. One thing that comes to mind is a saying that I’ve often heard repeated: “Everything in your life is what brings you to the current moment and makes you who and what you are.” Maybe it has been my curiosity and interest in religion, spiritual literature and retreats—maybe even astrology.

¹⁷⁹ Thomas N. Hart, “What to Expect in Christian Spiritual Direction,” *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction*, 13 no 1 (March 2007), 41.

¹⁸⁰ Sally Taylor, “What to Expect in Buddhist Spiritual Direction,” *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction* 13 no 3 (September 2007), 50.

My choices in life may have a lot to do with the neighborhood and surrounding community that I lived and grew up in. It was racially and culturally mixed and, within the immediate area, there were a number of churches of different Christian denominations. Venturing into surrounding areas, other faith traditions were discovered. That early exposure raised a curiosity about other people and also helped me to feel comfortable and confident around people who are different from me.

MEMORIES OF EARLY BEGINNINGS

My earliest recollection is sitting on my mother's lap with my right ear against the left wall of her chest, listening to hear heartbeat. I was around two years old. My mother told me stories of my infancy and toddlerhood such as, "Of all my babies, you never cried when you received an injection. You'd stare at the doctor and a tear would appear, but you didn't cry. You were always a friendly, jolly and curious baby." Who knew then that I would end up administering injections and being told that my technique was almost painless? It's wonderful when parents tell such stories to their offspring. It's very loving and empowering. It was also wonderful to see my mother's reaction when I told her that I remembered that lap scene. She also got great pleasure when I would call her on my birthday and say, "Hi, I'm calling to say thank you for being the first one at my very first birthday party." It was just one small way of being loving to her.

Another early memory of mine was, being taken to Saint Paul's Catholic Church. Father Hart, the parish priest, sprinkled water on my forehead. I was around four years old. My mother had me baptized in the hopes of enrolling me in Catholic school, but that never took place. I attended public schools from first to twelfth grades. After a trip to South Carolina to visit my grandmother, I began first grade at five and a half years old.

One of the first adventures out of the neighborhood was during a field trip arranged by the summer day camp. We went to see The Wizard of Oz with Judy Garland. My mother accompanied the teacher and the group of children. I was in second or third grade—seven or eight years old. By nine years of age, my mother placed me on the bus to go away to summer camp for two weeks in Nyack, New York—Camp Mount Lawn. That was my first real introduction to nature—hiking, different insects and animals—ladybugs, bee, butterflies, frogs, the scent of a skunk, and the wonderful camp fires, roasting marshmallows and hay rides. I also met children there who were different from me. Camp was great fun.

It is obvious that my mother was in all of my early memories and stories. She was a widow—a single parent who was left to rear, on her own, the last four of her seven living children. Her fourth child, a daughter, died in infancy. My mother never remarried. She often made two statements: “I have my children!” and “I don’t want a stepfather who may hurt my children!” My mother sacrificed a lot. She didn’t have much, but she was a very generous woman, often taking in other people’s children. She was my first spiritual teacher.

I was born in the Village of Harlem, on the Island of Manhattan, in the city and state of New York—USA! I consider myself a citizen of the universe. I am the eighth offspring of my mother and father; the ninth of my father. My parents entered their union of marriage with one son each from previous unions.

THE BEINGS I JOINED ON EARTH

I have no memories of my father. The little I know of him is from that which my mother, siblings and others have told me. He died when I was two years old. There is one photograph of him, which is now my property. My late sister said it does him no justice because he was very handsome. My father was born in New York City into a Catholic family. His mother, who died when he was young, was an African American woman who came from the south, but ventured to the New England area and then to New York City. His father, my paternal grandfather, was born in New York City or, as a European immigrant, came to the US at an early age. In any event, I was told that my grandfather was kicked off the police force when it was revealed that he had married a Black woman. When he became a widower, he married another Black woman. My father had three siblings, one brother and two sisters. His youngest sister had planned to become a nun, but opted for marriage. None of his siblings had children.

So, I learned early on that my father was biracial. The one story that I remember the most about him is: He was born on December 25th at the turn of the century—1899. He used to tell my mother that he was her Black Jesus. No matter how often I heard that story, I never tired of it. In fact, I loved it. As I got older and older, I cherished it. To me, it meant that my father was very clear about who and what he was. He had “Black Pride” long before it was fashionable because he lived during a time when people of color really boasted of their other than Black, African ancestry—when people like Cab Calloway and Lena Horne were considered beautiful because they had some Eurocentric features. That one story of my father has become an integral part of me—in fact—

empowering. It is something that he left behind especially for me—an empowering legacy.

My mother was born in South Carolina. She had one younger brother who died at the age of 20 during an influenza epidemic. He died two weeks after my maternal great grandmother, who succumbed to the same ailment. I found that information in the archives of Columbia, South Carolina in 1992. During that time, I and some other relatives were able to trace back to great, great, great, great grandparents. We then had knowledge of nine or ten generations—six living, four deceased.

My mother migrated to New York City to live with an aunt and male cousin, and to find work. She found a husband instead. Though she had come from a Baptist background, much later on in the sixties, she joined the Elmendorf Dutch Reformed Church—the oldest church in Harlem. It is still located at 121st Street in East Harlem. My mother's funeral was held there in March of 2006.

My mother was a very faithful woman. As I cleared out her apartment following her death, I found a number of worn out Bibles, especially the small pocket sized ones. She was a great lover of Psalms, and she used to refer me to her favorite ones when I was troubled. My maternal grandmother was also very faithful. Both women were my spiritual teachers. While my mother was a church going woman who read her Bible, she also read Astrology books. Zolar was very popular at that time. That might explain my interest in Astrology—what some call an inexact science, which is based on the belief that one's life is charted by the positions of the planets at the time of her or his birth. It is an ancient practice, often associated with the Egyptians. I've been told by people from India that charts are drawn up before marriage to determine if two people will be

compatible. My mother also used home remedies of herbs, powders, roots, salves and unguents. She would pin pouches to my undershirt that contained such things in order to keep me germ free and healthy. Some call such a pouch a talisman, which is used for protection. She and my grandmother, both Christian women, spoke of contact with the dead. They talked about “hants” (spirits that haunt), nightriders and witches, and they also mentioned people who were involved in ‘hoo doo’—they meant Voodoo. My mother often warned me not to eat in people’s homes because she didn’t want anyone harming her children. Those two women used to scare me sometimes.

My maternal grandparents moved to Newport News, Virginia, but they divorced when my mother and her brother were very young. My grandmother moved back to South Carolina with her two children to live with her mother. My great grandmother had to sell her farm because her husband had died and her two sons had to flee to Ohio to avoid being lynched. That made life harder for the family. My grandfather left Virginia and moved to New York City with his second wife. My sister and I used to visit with him. His wife was a very strange, unfriendly and scary woman. We were told that she was a “hoo doo woman.” We stuck close to Grandpa. My grandfather was a shoe cobbler. He owned a house and shoe shop in the Bronx. He claimed that some Whites had stolen his shoe polish formula and started a company that made them rich. When one hears such stories, true or false, the subject matter can either break the spirit or make it stronger. I chose the latter.

My grandmother used to “lay on hands” and pray when someone was in pain or ill. I remember her doing it for me once when I was in my teens. From that day to the present I can only remember her placing one hand on my abdomen and raising the other

to the heavens. I heard her say, “Lord, help this Baby!” She used to call me “You Baby”. I can only remember awakening a few hours later, pain free, refreshed and hungry. I had no recollection of anything in between. I passed out when she touched me—the way I have seen church attendees do when the “electronic preachers” (televangelists) strike them on the head and they fall out.

Another story of my grandmother was concerning her God. I showed her a copy of *Look Magazine* which had Robert Kennedy on the cover with a caption, “Suppose God is Black?”¹⁸¹ Grandma said to me emphatically, “Don’t you ever tell me my God is Black!” Of course she was talking about Jesus because nobody knows what God looks like. I said respectfully, “Okay Grandma,” and backed off, stunned at her reaction. Her view and the story of my father were quite different.

FROM FAMILY TO NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY

I grew up in East Harlem in a neighborhood where people seemed to care about each other and looked out for one another, often across racial and ethnic lines. I was exposed to a fusion of race, different ethnicities and religions very early.

I remember a thriving working class neighborhood. The men went to work. Before my father fell ill and died, he worked for the City Marshall, riding on the truck that came to dispossess people whose rents were in arrears. He worked with Italians who taught him to make spaghetti and other dishes. He, in turn, taught my mother. We had spaghetti once per week. When the kids in the building heard that my mother was making spaghetti, they would scurry up and down the fire escape and bring little dishes to

¹⁸¹ Senator Robert F. Kennedy, “Suppose God Is Black,” *Look Magazine*, March 23, 1966, 43-48.

get a taste. The habit became a tradition that has lasted for at least four generations in my family.

Sometimes the women, like my widowed mother, also worked. She had to find work after my father died. As the youngest child in the family, I became a latch-key kid. Otherwise, the ladies were stay at home moms. My best friend lived with me because her mother was a sleep-in worker. When we would visit her mother's job, we would have to use the servant's entrance. Even if a child or young person does not know the details of the situation, it's easy to sense that you are treated differently because you are different, be it class, race or otherwise. We were told the hair-raising stories of the south, but New York City was not without its own stories.

If people in the neighborhood did not go to work somewhere else or for someone else, they had their own businesses. There were couples, African-American, Irish and Jewish who ran mom and pop businesses: a barber shop, a produce store that sold iced cold slices of watermelon on hot summer days—later expanding to include fish and chips, fried chicken dinners and sandwiches; a junk shop that would today be called an antique store, and a candy store. There were a number of mixed-race, mixed ethnic couples—African-American and Italian; African-American and Chinese, and African-American and Puerto Rican. Their businesses included an upholstery shop, a parking lot, a hot dog and hamburger shop and a fish fry juke joint. The Mah family, Chinese, took over the grocery store originally run by Louie, the Jew; I played with Lilly Mah, the youngest daughter. The Nieves family, Puerto Ricans, followed the Mah family. Others who ran grocery stores were African-Americans and Cubans. There were other barber shops operated by African-Americans and Puerto Ricans. There were three African-

American ladies who owned beauty parlors and did hair Madame C. J. Walker style—wash, press and curl. Later, there was Rose Meta’s House of Beauty, owned by Ms. Rose Morgan, who was married to Joe Louis, the Heavyweight Champion of the World. The clients who patronized her shop were the well-to-do, sophisticated Black ladies. There were other businesses: Doc Jordan, the Jamaican, was our pharmacist; Hans, the German, ran the delicatessen that one of my brothers and his partner later became the proprietors of; Al, the Italian produce man had one side of a shop, and Benny, a Spaniard, had the butchery on the other side; the Candy Kitchen man, from one of the West Indian islands, spun candies of coconut, peppermint and chocolate; Papi, a Puerto Rican, had a juke joint where we listened to the latest records and danced. There was a dry cleaning shop owned by an African-American, and another by a Cuban woman and her son; Miss Margaret, the Polish woman, had a rooming house; Paul, the Greek, ran the launder mat, and there was a Chinese hand laundry; Freddie, the Fuller Brush man, was African-American, and Ro, the Black Panamanian, sold tins of candies. Florence Mills was a well known African-American masseuse in Harlem.

All of these people were hard working, taxpaying citizens who lived and worked side by side in a Harlem neighborhood long before multi-racial, multi-cultural, interfaith, multifaith concepts and terminologies were thought of—long before Diana Eck’s Pluralism Project that began in 1991 at Harvard University for “research on America’s new religious landscape.”¹⁸²

When I attended elementary school, the pupils were mostly of African descent and some Puerto Ricans. The teachers were predominantly White. In junior high school,

¹⁸²Diana L. Eck, “The Pluralism Project at Harvard University,” <http://www.pluralism.org>, (accessed February 10, 2010). To contact the Pluralism Project, email staff@pluralism.org

the teachers were still mostly White, but there were Irish and Italian students who lived around 120th Street and Palladio Avenue, which was also called Pleasant Avenue in East Harlem. There were some Germans in the area also. I remember Negro History week in both those schools. The only things the teachers seemed to teach were that Negroes came from Africa as slaves and George Washington Carver, the peanut farmer, did lots of things with peanuts. Maybe they said he was a scientist but, for the most part, he was downplayed. I don't recall ever hearing in school that he was the founder of the Tuskegee Institute, now a very famous institution of higher learning. I wanted to crouch down in my chair and go under the desk. I thought, "Is that all we're known for—slavery and peanuts?" A child's mind and spirit must be nourished and nurtured. I did not like what I was being fed.

Carter G. Woodson, now known as the father of African American History, started the Negro History Week, which is now African American-Diaspora History Month. A little over ten years following those early and unpleasant experiences in school, I read in his book, "The Negro in Our History," of the different African ethnic groups, some of whom were involved in trade with the Arabs as early as the year 1000, and who also converted to Islam, which spread to many of the countries of North and West Africa. During that early period, the Arabs and Africans blended well—before Arabs got involved in the slave trade around the year 1100. There were many great African empires and kingdoms that existed before the invasions that, to a great extent, caused their destruction.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro In Our History* (Washington, D. C.: The Associated Publishers, 1922), 7-12.

Woodson's book begins in Africa and covers Europe, North and South America, the West Indies and other areas where Africans, likened to commodities, were shipped to. He speaks of the Africans who rebelled and those who excelled in spite of the hostile environment and cruel, inhumane treatment they endured—all of which led up to slave rebellions and, ultimately, the Civil Rights Movement, where African Americans fought for freedoms now enjoyed by a number of immigrants who come to these shores today of their own free will. Carter G. Woodson gave me a greater sense of pride and inspired me to read and learn more about Africa's noble past and the contributions that her descendants made to America.

CHURCHES, CHURCHES, EVERYWHERE!

The neighborhood and community places of worship included storefront churches, many of which were Apostolic and Pentecostal faiths. The Jehovah's Witnesses had headquarters, but they used to knock on people's doors to spread their beliefs. There were larger churches—one called Lawson's Auditorium, which had been converted from an RKO movie theatre at 125th Street, between Park and Lexington Avenues. I'd never been inside, but it was clear that it was a very big space that required a large membership and substantial funds to keep it in operation. Fast forward, much later on Rev. Ike came along. He also had a Loew's theatre converted into a church at 175th and Broadway, which still stands. Rev. Ike was born Frederick Eickerentrotter. He was the first that many had ever heard to preach prosperity gospel before the influx of electronic preachers. Following his death in July, 2009, his son, Xaiviar became the primary pastor. Daddy Grace's House of Prayer, still at 125th Street and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard, was known for its large space. People spoke of Father Divine, the predecessor of all the

gentlemen mentioned, but I had never seen his church. He and Daddy Grace were known as religious leaders who put another spin on Christianity. All of them were known to live very well, own real estate and have very large and loyal followers. Arthur Huff Fauset speaks of their churches and followers as cults.¹⁸⁴

A friend and I went to the House of Prayer to satisfy our curiosity because we had neighbors in the building who were members there. They often borrowed from others because they always seemed to run out of money. It was quite an experience to see the Bishop Grace, well into his advanced years, and his devotees revering him in ways that were difficult to understand and also hysterically funny to two teenage girls. His followers taped paper currency to objects such as baby carriages and mini chariots to present to him. One little girl's dress was completely covered in bills, and they proudly marched her through the aisle to present her to their bishop. Perhaps that's where the neighbors' dollars were being spent.

There were also some headquarters for the Seventh Day Adventists, who were known to worship on Saturday like the Jews, and the Salvation Army, who accepted and served all people regardless of their faith tradition. They constructed a sizable building on East 125th Street.

In contrast to the storefront churches attended by African Americans and a few Hispanics who were non Catholic, there were the larger Black churches of the Baptists, Methodist and AME Zionists; Saint Paul's Catholic Church seemed to be the largest structure—steps leading up to a grand building that I found to be one of the most mysterious places. It seemed huge inside, dimly lit with the flickering candles, the smell

¹⁸⁴ Arthur Huff Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941, 1971, 2002), 22, 52.

of incense, the echoes of footsteps and kneeling benches coming in contact with the stone floor. The holy water fountain and the confessional booth were really oddities to me. I found the whole experience of going there intriguing and eerie. Another oddity—the Catholic Church was always open. Anyone could go in at almost anytime. That was not the case with the storefront or other churches unless there were activities or programs other than Sunday worship services. One of the other houses of worship that was the greatest curiosity to the neighborhood youngsters was the Greek or Russian Orthodox church around 121st Street and Madison Avenue. I never went inside, but my brother said that he remembers the long processions and big feasts they used to have. I stood at the doorway and watched the men in the long black robes, similar to the ones the Catholic priests wore.

From time to time the neighborhood churches would make bus trips to Pennsylvania, where we discovered the Amish and Mennonite people. They were another mystery, with the women clothed in long dresses and bonnets, and the men in big hats and overalls. The covered, horse-drawn wagons made them seem as though they were still living in an earlier century—like people we saw in the movies. They seemed unreal.

As mentioned earlier, Father Hart sprinkled my forehead at Saint Paul's Catholic Church when I was about four years old. At around nine years of age, I'd stand in the doorway of the Apostolic Church. I was fascinated by the singing, shouting, holy-dancing, tambourine-playing sisters. Soon, my friends joined me in the doorway. The church sisters would come to the door and say, "Come in children." It wasn't too long before some of us were going inside and learning the books of the Bible. We'd recite

them by heart. That was not what we were interested in, though. We wanted to sing and beat those tambourines. Well, we did that, but we also had to kneel on cushions and tarry until we spoke in tongues. We were instructed to say “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus” repeatedly. After awhile, sounds were coming out of our mouths—probably from sheer exhaustion and painful knees.

There were a number of children and young people who belonged to the Apostolic church. The very first African I met belonged to the Apostolic Church. She came to America from Liberia with her father. He married an African American woman from the south. She did not like to say that she was from Africa because she did not want to be different from the other children. At that young age, we were not taught about our connection to Africa. We later believed her to be a lucky person to have known where she came from in Africa.

At any rate, for those of us who did not belong to the church, our parents had no idea of what we were doing. We were told by the church sisters to go home and ask our parents if we could be baptized. When I dashed home to ask my mother, she told me no because she planned to have me baptized in the Baptist Church when I reached twelve years of age. I asked if I could return to the Apostolic Church that evening. When I got there, the sisters dressed me in a white gown, and Elder Till helped me onto a step stool into a big, rectangular tub that had been filled with a water hose. Previously, it had a top and a cloth draped over it. When I got into the water, Elder Till said some words and dunked me under. Upon my return home later that evening, with soaking wet hair, I greeted a very annoyed mother. About two and a half years later, she had the reverend of her Baptist Church submerge me in water. This time it was the pool beneath the pulpit,

where I descended a few steps and waded into the water for the ritual to take place. It was at that same church, around three to four years later, that I may have decided I didn't want to attend anymore. There were a few things I found bewildering and disturbing—two things in particular. My mother never spoke of them, but I think they disturbed her as well. There was a complete record posted on the wall in the vestibule of the church which contained the names of all the members who were up to date or delinquent in their dues. My mother was one of the persons who couldn't always pay her dues on time. I could see that that display was painfully embarrassing to her. The way I viewed it was, she was a widow trying to rear her children—the church should have been helping her. After all, isn't one of the roles of the pastor to look after his flock—not exclusively the other way around? The other disturbing factor was the women who wore finery—fox stoles with the heads still attached and their Sunday-go-to meeting hats, which were constructed by Harlem milliners. After their call and response during the sermon, telling the pastor, “preach! Amen! Hallelujah!” — they would stand in the vestibule or on the sidewalk outside of the church and talk about the women who were plainly dressed. I thought they were such hypocrites. Not too long afterwards, I was on a quest to find my own way.

THE DIFFERENT, THE UNUSUAL AND THE NON CHRISTIAN MINORITIES

Perhaps the first time I saw someone in the neighborhood who was really different was an East Indian family who came from the West Indies. The grandmother dressed in white from head to toe. She was always barefooted, except in winter when she wore only sandals. I never found out why she dressed as she did or went shoeless, but she was certainly a curiosity. There were also the Gypsies of the neighborhood, who read

palms, told fortunes and had a reputation for stealing. They lived at the back part of their storefronts, and they wore long dresses and dangling earrings. We usually saw the women and children—not the men. Maybe they blended in.

There was also a group of Black Jews, who were said to be Ethiopian, around 123rd Street near Mount Morris Park, now Marcus Garvey Park, close to Lenox Avenue, which is now Malcolm X Boulevard. There was, and still is, another Jewish synagogue at 126th Street and Old Broadway, which is attended by a mixed congregation. Mosque #7 at 116th Street existed, but I'd never been there. I didn't know at the time that there was a Sunni mosque in Harlem and also one in Brooklyn. There was also the Turkish Bath House around 124th Street and Madison Avenue. It was not a house of worship, but it was another of the exotic cultural aspects of the area where I grew up.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD, THE COMMUNITY AND BEYOND

High school meant that the neighborhood teens would take the subway downtown. Likened to a main character in one of James Baldwin's literary classics, we ventured south of Central Park to begin another leg of the journey—the spiritual journey of life.¹⁸⁵

No longer in the East Harlem community, there were many more white students. The African Americans were more of a curiosity to them than vice versa, which could be one of the reasons we were invited to their parties. When some of the kids asked us where we lived, we responded, “uptown!” We didn't say Harlem. Needless to say, the white kids didn't come uptown. Once, we met a young actor who had been in the movie,

¹⁸⁵ James Baldwin, *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (New York: A Dell Book, 1953), 33.

The Diary of Ann Frank. Aside from the fact that there was an actor in our midst, the subject matter of the movie sparked a discussion.

Whites used to live in Harlem before Black folk moved uptown. African-Americans lived in the Wall Street area and the surrounding environs where the African Burial Ground exists. While some have stated that the wall was built to separate Blacks and Whites, a recent source claims that Blacks were used to build the wall to protect White settlers from the Native American population at the site of today's Wall Street in downtown Manhattan.¹⁸⁶

The High School of Commerce was located where Lincoln Center now stands. It was an interesting place. Jazz musician, Sonny Stitt's sister, Sarah, attended there. She was a fine Jazz vocalist in her own right. Dee, the daughter of Dave Lambert of the Lambert, Hendricks and Ross Jazz vocal trio, also attended. We hung out with her for a while. Her mother had an apartment in Greenwich Village.

Once I got to high school, a close childhood friend and I began to explore beyond our immediate neighborhood. We'd go to One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street and Seventh Avenue, now Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard. We would listen to the soapbox orators, many of whom were Garvyites from Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement. These days, that area of the city is populated by many people from Africa, some of whom now refer to themselves as African-Americans and people of the African Diaspora. We would visit Misheaux's Bookstore, which was filled with history books, literature and periodicals on the African Diaspora. One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street was fertile ground, rich soil for a connection or reconnection to one's cultural and

¹⁸⁶ The New York Slave Summary and Record,
http://www.slaverinamerica.org/geography/slave_laws_NY.htm.

spiritual roots. Going there was a Rights of Passage for two Harlem girls—the friend of my youth and me.

We frequented the neighborhood evening center at James Fennimore Cooper Junior High School, where we could listen to Afro-Jazz. We also went to a place called Dambala Ouedo. It was on the fourth floor of 303 West 125th Street. The name was believed to have come from Haiti, but it originally came from Dahomey, West Africa, now Benin. It seemed like a night spot. Drummers were always present there. From there, we graduated to the Jazz concerts on Randall's Island and the Apollo Theatre where true Jazz greats performed—Thelonius Monk, Art Blakley, Milt Jackson and the Modern Jazz Quartet, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Cannonball Adderley, Ahmad Jamal, Horace Silver, Dizzy Gillespie, Sarah Vaughn, Gloria Lynn, Dakota Staton, Carmen McRae, Dinah Washington and many more. We saw Olatunji of Nigeria and his Drums of Passion, and also Maya Angelou when she returned from Africa—both at the Apollo. We were energized by the drums, and awed by Maya Angelou. We sang and danced for weeks after leaving those shows. We also listened to jazz, rhythm and blues, Afro-jazz, Latin and Latin-jazz via radio and records—LP (*long playing*) albums being the latest form of recording of the day.

We went to dances at the 369th Armory on Fifth Avenue in Harlem, as well as the Audubon Ballroom, where Malcolm X was assassinated, to see the Grandassa Models—a group of deep brown to black skinned women with natural, unstraightened hair. Those were the “Naturally” shows, each followed by the year we were in—Naturally 61 and so forth, which were produced by the Braithwaite brothers. Light-skinned women were not allowed to be a part of the production. It was payback time. After all, the black

magazines, which shall go unnamed, usually featured the women of color like Lena Horne spoken of earlier and also Dorothy Dandridge—the ones with features closer to the Eurocentric standards of beauty. Whether light or dark skinned, the aftermath of slavery did its damage to the spirit of the Africans who were brought from their homeland against their will. In any event, my friend and I, she dark, me light, were the first two girls in our high school to sport the natural hairdo, which later became the Afro and then the Fro.

We explored Greenwich Village, its coffee houses, lofts and Ned Williams' Dance Studio. We went to Cooper Union on Friday evenings for free concerts and poetry readings. We purchased our clothing and shoes, leather bags and jewelry from quaint shops on streets laid with cobblestones, in Greenwich Village. Two favorite shops were the Persian Bazaar, its proprietor, a Persian, and the Ye Olde Treasure Shop, where master craftsmen made beautiful items of leather.

SEARCHING AND SEEKING

Although we never ventured inside of the Nation of Islam's Temple Number 7 on 116th Street, Malcolm X's skilled oratory sparked an interest in Islam as it had been introduced and presented at that time. One weekend we went to the 369th Armory to hear Malcolm X speak. The place was abuzz with excitement and filled to capacity. Malcolm X was not present. Elijah Muhammad, the founder of the Black Muslims, later to become the Nation, was present. The disappointment was heavy and thick in the air. It was very difficult to understand what Mr. Muhammad was saying. People were saying, "What did he say? Did you understand him?" It became clear why Malcolm X was the spokesperson and the voice for the Nation. Little did we know at that time, during summer break from high school, that Malcolm X would be ousted from the Nation, take

Shahada, declaration to become Sunni Muslim, make the Hajj, pilgrimage, to Mecca and become El Hajj Malik El Shabazz. Little did we know that, less than ten years later, Malcolm X would be assassinated in one of the very places we had visited—the Audubon Ballroom where we had attended the fashion shows. Little did we know on that warm summer day, that we would take Shahada two and one half years later. It was actually four years after taking Shahada that I walked pass El Hajj Malik El Shabazz’s casket where he laid in repose at the Unity Funeral Home on 126th Street and Frederick Douglass Boulevard. He was the first Muslim that I had seen in the white shroud. As for the warm summer day that we heard Elijah Muhammad speak, suffice it to say that the idea of joining the Nation was placed on hold.

In the meantime, while walking through 125th Street, my friend and I discovered a loft with a sign in the window that read, “African Theological Center.” After ascending the stairs to explore and inspect, we found out that it was a Yoruba Temple. We began to attend the ceremonies called bembes. Elegba, known as the road opener, was a stone at the door, which was supposed to be saluted on the way in and out; everyone present danced to the drums and chanted to the Orisha—Oshun, Obatala, Oshosi, Shango, Ogun, Elegba, Yemaja and Oya. Participants took an initiation with the Babalao—Nana Oserjiman Ofuntala Adefunmi, and received divinations with the coconut and cowry shells to determine one’s Orisha or deity. Everybody wore African attire and the long strands of beads called ileke—in the colors that represented one’s Orisha, and everyone was given a Yoruba name. Classes were given to learn the Yoruba language. One afternoon we went aboard one of the Black Star Line ships, which was from Ghana, docked at the 42nd Street Pier. We had lunch with some people from the temple, crew

members and Ghanaian students. Marcus Garvey, a strong advocator for back to Africa, had once been very involved with the shipping line. It was an exciting and unforgettable experience.

We re-visited Dambala Ouedo. It was discovered on the second and subsequent visits that many of people who frequented the place also practiced the Yoruba religion and would go there to chant and dance to the drums and the Orisha. Some would become “possessed,” similar to the tambourine playing sisters in the Apostolic and Pentecostal churches who got the spirit, did the holy dance and fell out on the floor.

One and a half years after the experience at the Yoruba Temple, the next venture was the International Muslim Society, which was a Sunni mosque on the third floor of 303 West 125th Street. The name was shortened and referred to as “303.” It was mostly attended by African Americans, African-Caribbean Americans and Africans from Guinea, Mali, the Sudan and Somalia. Some Pakistanis also went there for Friday Jumma, worship service. The imam, with whom one took Shahada, to state one’s intention to become a Muslim by declaring that there is only one God, was a Pakistani by the name of Maghbul. He was a Hafiz, one who commits to memory the Holy Quran, cover to cover. Every Ramadan it was he who led the long prayers every night for the entire thirty days of the fasting period. He became our first Islamic teacher. The International Muslim Society was another very fascinating place. There were people there, mostly men, who had studied Islam in Africa and the Middle East. One day the Jazz musician, Ahmad Jamal, showed up there with his wife. How exciting was that? We had seen him at the Apollo not too long before that.

While learning to become a Muslim, I revisited the conversation about God that I had had with my grandmother. It occurred to me that I did not have to put a face on the divine. My young mind was not as clear about it then as it later became, but the idea of no image of God cut through all the discussion about what God looked like. I didn't have to think about that anymore. It was comforting and liberating.

As newly converted Muslims, we had to learn the ritual of prayer—the prescribed body movements and short Quranic verses in Arabic—taught by transliteration. Of utmost importance, we had to learn how to make the proper ablutions before prayer. The Islamic community to which we had become a part, consisted of older people who had converted to Islam many years before we had, and also of those who were born into Islam from the countries of their birth. One other important component of being a Muslim woman was to learn the proper behavior expected of the female gender, such as praying apart from the men, proper attire, and not speaking before a mix gender gathering. Such behavior was not taught by the few older women in the mosque. All of the teachers were male.

After Imam Maghbul, the next teacher was an elderly man from Malaysia named Ali Babrek, affectionately called Ali Baba. He was a Shaykh even though he didn't use the title. He discussed the presence of the angels, including the angel of death, and the jinns who are devious little beings believed to lure one into forbidden behavior. He also taught Arabic prayers by transliteration, but he never assumed the duties of imam. He did not lead prayers in the mosque.

The teacher following Ali Baba, who was Imam Tawfiq, was an African American who had studied in Egypt. He spoke fluent Arabic and taught Arabic classes,

as well as classes in Sharia, Islamic law, and history. We attended those classes for about eighteen months. Ahmad Tawfiq also performed the Friday Jummah services at “303” before he found a space to open his own mosque, the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood. Visits were also made to other mosques at One Riverside Drive, usually led by Egyptians, and Islamic communities in Brooklyn—one on State Street that had existed for many years with an elderly gentleman of African descent, Shaykh Daud.

For about three years we attended conferences in Nyack, New York hosted by the Muslim Students Association (MSA). We met Muslims from Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya and other countries. The Quranic chanting and recitations at those conferences were very beautiful.

The Arabic teacher following Tawfiq was at the New School for Social Research. He was from Lebanon or Syria. He also had a radio show. I only attended classes with him for about six months. I met Sister Betty Shabazz, the widow of Malcolm X, at that time. She was studying French as a requirement for her Ph.D. Whenever I met her after that, she was always friendly and gracious. A number of years later I had asked her if she’d be interested in being a guest speaker at a women’s event. She was living in Mount Vernon, New York at the time, and she gave me her telephone number. I never got to make the call because she died as a result of a fire in her home.

Many years after the classes with the teacher from the Middle East, I saw him on television as a spokesperson for the Middle Eastern community following the tragedy of September 11, 2001. Shortly after the experience at the New School, I left the Islamic community that I had been a part of for at least seven years, but I never left Islam. There were still miles to go. My spiritual journey took on more legs and new turns.

I HAD NOT BEEN TO ME

Within a year, I entered college to become a Registered Nurse. The following spring, I took my first trip out of the United States to Nassau, Bahamas. The next spring, I met my husband-to-be at a retreat in Nyack, New York—the same place I had gone to camp when I was nine and ten years old, and the same place where I had gone to the MSA conferences. We were married two years and eight months later. We worked—he as a college professor and I as a nurse. We both attended graduate school—he, earning his Ph.D. and I, two masters' degrees. We also traveled frequently.

What a blessing it is to have seen six of the seven continents—twenty two states of America and visits to Canada and Vancouver; nine African countries, seven Asian; thirteen European; five Central and South American; ten Caribbean and West Indian Islands, and Australia and New Zealand. Some of my excursions were trans-cultural nursing conferences where American nurses met with nurses, physicians and other health-care practitioners, including the Barefoot Doctors in China and Maori herbalists in New Zealand. What a blessing it is to have seen as much of God's earth and as many of God's people as I have. Each country and its people have memorable qualities. There can be such awe-inspiring, breath-taking beauty, excitement and riches. There are also the contrasts of poverty and sadness. Yet, whether people live in a hut or a palace, they rise to meet the day. Some do not know where their next meal will come from, and others are assured of it. For the most part, the average human being is trying to do the same basic things to live—seek shelter and covering from the elements; food to eat; work; strive to attend school; congregate to worship; find time to play, celebrate, sing and dance—and always, try to make a good and better life for their children. Such is

what I have witnessed through travel. It has helped me to feel more connected to those who are different from me—allowing me to see more of our sameness.

In the midst of marriage, work, studies and travel, I continued exploring. There were friends who tried to get me to become a Buddhist, but I was not interested in converting to another faith. I was curious about other traditions, but Islam remained my frame of reference.

One very fascinating and interesting retreat that I attended was sponsored by the Sufi Healing Order. It was a weeklong event in the Black Mountains of North Carolina where, I was told, Billy Graham resided. The retreat took place on the premises of the YMCA. Accommodations were made for at least 200 attendees. All vegetarian meals were served the entire week. It was an interfaith event. Tee Pees were pitched on the grounds for the sweat lodges. We did Sufi dancing and chanting; Oshina Fastwolf, of the Mohawk and Tinae (Apache) clans, led the women's moonlight ceremony; Wallace Black Elk, the son of Black Elk of the Oglala Sioux Nation along with his wife, Grace Spotted Eagle, and their adult son, each led the sweat lodge ceremony—thirteen people to each lodge. I did the ceremony with Grace Spotted Eagle. There was a Christian healer and clairvoyant by the name of Olga Worrell; a Jain monk who gave a beautiful lecture on being a person who strives to do good in spite of bad things some people do and say. When asked by a participant, "What if someone says bad things about you? What do you do?" The monk said, "Let the person be!" The young man then asked, "How can you let such a person be when he is saying terrible things that can damage your reputation?" The monk asked him, "What do you think will happen to you if you throw dirt up at the sun?" The young man thought for an instant and responded, "It will fall back on me." The

monk said, “There is your answer!” Patricia Sun was also there. She spoke of her experience communicating with the dolphins. Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, the Singing Rabbi, had us singing and dancing all over the auditorium.

When I returned home from the retreat and told others the wonders of my experience, some thought the people I had seen and been with at the retreat were “crazy people.” They should have seen and heard the participants who were lined up in the hallway calling home on the public phones: “Honey, I wish you had come with me! This is great! I am having a wonderful experience! You would love this!” I was one of those persons telling my husband something similar.

I later volunteered at conferences for Henry Rucker, a lecturer on mind-body healing, and also at the Omega Institute’s annual weekend conferences that were held at the Marriott Hotel in New York City. Life continued to be pretty full with marriage, work, travel and time spent with family and friends, but I yearned for something more—a spiritual community and fellowship were lacking, but I didn’t want to return to the Islamic community that I had left so many years before.

Meanwhile, I lost the job that I had been on for fifteen years. That was a blessing in disguise because the working conditions had become extremely stressful and unbearable. Two months later, September 11th took place. About six months later, a friend invited me to a training to do crisis counseling for persons suffering from post traumatic stress disorder as a result of September 11th. Six months after I began the counseling, during which time my husband and I began house hunting, my only sister died. Nine months after my sister’s death, my elderly mother had a stroke. From the hospital, she went for rehabilitation in a nursing home. I had to get her settled into the

environment so that I could look for a job. I returned to adjunct teaching. Around that time, the same friend invited me to attend heal-the-healer sessions with the STAR program (Seminars for Trauma and Recovery) at the Eastern Mennonite University in West Virginia. It was such a blessing that those seminars were available to me because the grief from the death of my sister, and trying to oversee my mother's care were taking their toll on me and putting quite a bit of strain on my marriage. Once the emotional and psychological pain began to ease and I was able to make the move into our new quarters, I found a part-time nursing job as a consultant for an agency. I still thought about a place where I could free my spirit. I wondered if I could find an interfaith center to get myself back on track until I could find an Islamic community to fill the void resulting from the community I had left so long ago. Then I thought, "If I don't find an interfaith center, I'll return to school for a doctorate degree. I've done enough traveling for a while!"

THERE ARE BLESSINGS IN CALAMITIES

I met a woman in the nursing home where my mother resided. She was the musical therapist at the sing along I had taken my mother to during her rehabilitation period. When I took my mother to the Sunday worship services, the same woman was there playing the piano. I later found out that she is a Sufi Muslim. She is a retired opera diva from Kansas who had converted to Islam. About one year later, she invited me to her graduation ceremony. She was graduating from One Spirit Interfaith Seminary as an ordained interfaith minister. As I sat through the ceremony, amongst hundreds of people, I wept as an inner voice said, "This is it! This is what you've been looking for!" From within, I responded, "In two years I want to be where they are!" I was referring to the graduates standing before us in the Cathedral of St. John, the Divine. I was not aware

then that that was discernment—a communication and conversation going on within myself and a Greater Source.

I enrolled at One Spirit Interfaith Seminary, studied while I worked, and looked after my mother and all affairs concerning her. I kept asking myself what was I doing becoming a minister? Then I asked myself, what am I going to do as a minister? Then it dawned on me that I had been performing a type of ministry—as a nurse, as a teacher and as a crisis counselor. My mother died three months before my ordination and graduation in June, 2006. I had yet another period of grief and mourning to get through.

Shortly before graduation from One Spirit Interfaith Seminary, our class was introduced to spiritual counseling. It captured my attention and interest. In addition, I had thought of seeking the services because, no sooner than I was getting over the death of my sister, my mother died. I began spiritual counseling sessions when I enrolled in the course three months later. Eighteen months later, I applied to New York Theological Seminary's (NYTS) doctor of ministry program with a multifaith context. I was informed of the program by a community chaplain who was an enrollee. She is also Muslim. I had met her at the STAR program of the Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia. She invited me to be on the board of her organization, the Muslim Women's Institute for Research and Development (MWIRD). I also met Shaykh Dr. Ibrahim Abdul-Malik, who is a board member of the STAR program. He has since become my spiritual advisor. It is often said, "There are no accidents!" The pieces of the puzzle were fitting together. I was coming full circle—meeting Muslims who would be very special in my life.

Three years after the experience at the Eastern Mennonite University, I was at an interview at the New York Theological Seminary. Asked, “What might your topic be for your doctoral thesis? Do you have one?” Admittedly, I had not anticipated that question upon interview—before I began classes, even before I knew whether I would be approved for admission. Without hesitation or thought, I responded, “Yes, I have a topic! It is spiritual counseling or spiritual direction!” The rest is history.

All of the multiracial, multicultural and multifaith exposures that I have had from my earliest years have prepared me and transported me to this present place on my earth’s journey—my spiritual journey. Ronald Takaki sums it up:

Reflected in a mirror without distortions, the people of multicultural America belong to what Ishmael Reed described as a society “unique” in the world because “the world is here”—a place where cultures criss-cross.¹⁸⁷

The neighborhood and community of my youth, set in the village of East Harlem, on the Island of Manhattan was, back then, a microcosm of the multicultural America that is today.

My life, with all of its climbs, laps, legs, twists and turns, has been and is my spiritual journey. In spite of betrayals, challenges, disappointments, heartbreaks, loss and setbacks, I have known love, health, peace, family, a long marriage, friendship, laughter, seen many corners of God’s earth and so much more—wealth in many forms, on many levels.

¹⁸⁷ Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1993, 2008), 19.

CHAPTER 6

PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION SESSIONS WITH DIRECTEES

Prior to implementing the plan for this demonstration project, goals were set, and strategies to meet those goals were determined.

Goal 1 for this demonstration project, Faith to Faith: Spiritual Direction with a Multifaith Context, was to examine my own spiritual journey and path. The preceding chapter demonstrates that examination. Early childhood, teenage years and young adulthood were revisited in order to reflect upon and assess the Christian beginning and what ultimately led up to the conversion to Islam; interest in matters of interfaith, multifaith and interspiritual relations in general, and spiritual direction in particular.

Strategy 1 examined my spiritual and religious (Islamic) beliefs and resources that help me to maintain my faith in God and Islam and, thereby, providing me a firm foundation for effectiveness as an interfaith, multifaith and interspiritual spiritual director. In other words, to help me to provide spiritual direction services to Muslim and non Muslim seekers.

Strategy 2 examined, in detail, what led to my interests in interfaith, multifaith and interspiritual ministry and spiritual direction, namely, looking beyond my own spiritual and religious (Islamic) beliefs. An early exposure to different Christian

denominations and exposure to other faith traditions as a teenager provided a strong foundation, which lit the spark that would ultimately become a way of believing, thinking and practicing—respecting and interacting with those who believe, think and practice their spiritualities and religions in different ways.

Strategy 3 recalled how my interest in general and my spiritual journey in particular resulted in my decision to become an interfaith, multifaith, interspiritual spiritual director.

Goal 2 was to reach beyond Islamic beliefs and minister to members of other faiths. The way in which that would be carried out would be to offer and provide spiritual direction sessions to directees of various religious and spiritual beliefs from an interfaith, interspiritual and multifaith context and to also receive spiritual direction from a director who is non Muslim (See Chapter 8).

The goal was met by recruiting seven volunteer subjects who would be directees for the project; each directee attended a series of sessions, once per month over a period of six months. Each session was a fifty-minute contact hour.

Strategy 1 Application of the indirect approach to spiritual direction was carried out by providing a safe space, availability, comfort and presence; attentiveness, compassion, non judgment, silence, listening and maintenance of documentation for case reports to the supervising spiritual director.

Strategy 2 Application of additional tools of the indirect approach was carried out by reflecting and questioning. This goal was met when a directee expressed a concern and the spiritual director reflected or questioned a particular concern. An example would be the Buddhist directee who was having a conflict about her work and Buddhist practice

to the point where she had given up all or most of her personal interests and pleasures. She was questioned in a reflecting manner, “Do you think that you can get to where you wish to be in your work and practice and also deserve a personal life?” It must have given her something to think about because she began to resume her personal life and still work and practice diligently at the Zen center where she resides.

Strategy 3.Reporting to the supervising spiritual director was carried out periodically to discuss cases, receive feedback and input, and submit case reports.

Goal 3 was to utilize the direct approach to spiritual direction. This goal was carried out by offering ways that may be helpful to the directee, assisting her in achieving in balance in her spiritual practice and or mundane life, such as giving an exercise between sessions. One example would be to help a directee to realize that she has made achievements in her life. It was suggested to Case #3, who felt that she had not accomplished anything, to take out a wedding picture to remind her of her marriage of more than thirty years; to take out a photo of the son she helped to rear, who does not give her any problems; to take out a photo of one of the homes that was built in the family business she helped to develop, and to take out the book she co-wrote with her aunt. The exercise was for her to place all of the photos and the book within view to remind her of her achievements. She went on a book tour as a result.

Strategy 1 Explore with the directee what his or her religious beliefs and practices are. This strategy was carried out by asking Case #4, another person who expressed that her fears paralyzed her, “What do you think God is showing you or expects from you around the issue of fear?” Her answer the following month was, “God wants me to trust Him and trust myself.”

Strategy 2 Suggest use of spiritual practices as a means to deepen and heighten a sense of spiritual connectedness, for example the suggestion was made to one of the directees to go on a nature walk or a walking meditation and look for and pay attention to things that are not usually noticed. This exercise was suggested for the purpose of quieting the mind and to feel more connected to God and or nature.

Strategy 3 Suggest exercises or homework assignments such as the directee thinking of spiritual practices that could be added to her own, like listening to sacred or inspirational music, singing as a means of “flowering” the soul.

There were seven volunteer subjects (directees) in this demonstration project: Faith to Faith: Spiritual Direction with a Multifaith Context-- four are interfaith ministry seminarians at the One Spirit Interfaith Seminary (OSIS) in New York City; one is a 2008 graduate of OSIS, and the remaining two are not associated with OSIS.

The OSIS spiritual direction program offers spiritual direction sessions to its ministry students. The seminarians have the opportunity to receive spiritual direction sessions with students and graduates of the Interfaith Ministry and Spiritual Direction programs. The sessions are without cost. The volunteers were assigned by an assistant dean who is coordinator for the director-directee session scheduling. There were no males in this demonstration project, conceivably so, as female seminarians outnumber the males. Three of the directees are New Yorkers: Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan. The other four live outside of New York State, three of which were distant learners. One traveled to classes, and the other, a graduate of OSIS, relocated from New York City to the New England area. As a result, a number of the sessions were conducted over the telephone.

Each subject for this demonstration project was informed that the sessions they would be involved in would also be a part of a demonstration project for a doctoral program. They were informed that a commitment was required for a six-month period; an informed consent form (See Appendix A) had to be signed for use of their information, excluding their identity; a written statement for OSIS describing their experience and impression of the program (See Chapter 7: Evaluation) had to be submitted, along with a completed evaluation form (See Appendix C for sample of the form, and Appendix D for results of the completed forms) for their participation in the New York Theological (NYTS) demonstration project.

The information for each of the seven volunteer directees is extracted from written session reports (See Appendix B) that had to be submitted to and discussed with a spiritual direction supervisor. Even though the sessions were mainly listening on the part of the spiritual director, questions were posed and reflection was utilized to highlight certain areas of the subjects' discussions. Sometimes assignments or exercises were given between sessions. The extracts are shortened, but provide the reader an overview of each case, demonstrating the outstanding issues in each life.

At the next-to-the-last session, each volunteer was informed of her options following the OSIS spiritual direction program and the NYTS doctoral demonstration project. The options: Continue sessions with the current spiritual director; choose a spiritual director from the roster of OSIS; choose a spiritual director from the Spiritual Directors International Directory or discontinue sessions after the project. The names used are not the actual names of the volunteer subjects.

VOLUNTEER SUBJECTS' (DIRECTTEES') PROFILES

Case #1 (Abigail)

Female, Caucasian, between 46 to 55 years of age; law degree; second-year seminarian (who has since graduated); divorced; three adult offspring - two daughters, one son; attends different denominations' services within Judaism, brought up in modern Orthodox Judaism, not a member of a spiritual community (does not want to attend the synagogue she and former husband attended together because he still attends), goes to various synagogues until finding one to attend exclusively, spiritual practice includes "daily conversations with the Divine (prayer), reads religious texts and inspirational, spiritual literature, enjoys mulling over the reading and reflecting on the thoughts and feelings derived from it, pondering the mysteries of life and insights that are revealed to me through the Bat Kol, the daughter voice of God...singing, received an aliyah (a "going up" immigrating to the Land of Israel...not for the purpose of remaining there...the honor of being called to participate in the Reading of the Torah in the synagogue...) enjoyed it since, years back, only men read from the Torah and participated in these rituals."¹⁸⁸

Case #2 (Alisha)

Female, Caucasian, between 46 to 55 years of age; graduate degree (MA), interfaith seminary graduate, Dharma teacher in the School of Zen; Membership director, Zen Center; married; one adult daughter; Zen Buddhist for eight years, convert from Christian Protestant faith, member of a Zen center/temple; has sought counsel with

¹⁸⁸Geoffrey Wigoder, *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism* (Washington Square, New York: New York University press, 2002), 52.

religious/spiritual leader; regularly involved in spiritual practice of meditation; reads a variety of faith-based texts; other practices include goals “to integrate all my activities, relationships, thoughts and actions towards 100% spiritual practice.”

Case #3 (Cabretta)

Female, Middle Eastern, between 56 to 65 years of age; high school graduate with two years of college, yoga teaching certificate, works from home in family contracting business; married, one teenage son; considers herself interfaith, grew up Presbyterian, studied Hinduism for thirty-five years, attends Unity services for community and fellowship, current spiritual practice includes prayer, meditation and affirmations, does not seek the counsel of a religious leader. “I do yoga postures most days, study a Course in Miracles, read Christian literature, though I don’t really read scriptures. I find most scriptures uninspiring. I prefer a spiritual outlook on life that doesn’t need or care about scriptural support.”

Case #4 (Doritha)

Female; African Descent; between 56-65 years of age; BSN degree, Registered Professional Nurse; divorced with five adult offspring - three sons and two daughters, three grandsons; Muslim convert from Christianity, practicing Islam for forty years, attends mosque for community support, seeks counsel with religious leader, spiritual practice includes prayer, meditation and devotional prescribed prayer chants (zikr), or chanting the names of Allah, God and phrases of Allah, reads scriptures and sacred texts as well as inspirational literature.

Case #5 (Emma)

Female; Caucasian, 36-45 years of age; MA degree, teacher certificate and educational supervisor certificate; teacher; separated; three daughters, 19, 15 and 7; Christian-Quaker and Unity, was raised Catholic, Quaker for twelve years, belongs to a faith community for the common belief and practice, seeks counsel from a religious leader, spiritual practice includes prayer, meditation, affirmations and visualization, reads scriptures and sacred texts and also A Course in Miracles, practices yoga.

Case #6 (Lawissa)

Female, Caucasian, 56-65 years of age; MA degree in art therapy; divorced; two adult offspring - one daughter, one son; current spiritual practice is consciousness spirituality, wasn't raised with any faith tradition, follows teachings of Advashanti, Jon Bernie and Loch Kelly, began studying Hindu meditation seventeen years ago and listening to Advashanti three or four years ago, not a member of a faith community, spiritual practice includes prayer, meditation and imagery, reads the Bible, the Quran, Upanishads and the Bagavad Gita (Hindu sacred texts).

Case #7(Roberta)

Female; African Descent; 46-55 years of age; BA Liberal Arts; Registered Professional Nurse; single; no offspring; current religious belief is the Holiness Protestant (Apostolic) faith, it is her faith since childhood, not a member of a church, does not seek counsel from a religious leader. "I don't have a spiritual leader other than God whom I have sought counsel and guidance from. I tend not to put my faith in people because they are human just like me. I have not found something to commit to or someone to believe in."

The following information contains a summary analysis for each volunteer subject who participated in the six-month demonstration project. Sessions for each over the six-month period of the project are in Appendix B.

SUMMARY ANALYSIS OF VOLUNTEER SUBJECTS (DIRECTEES)

Summary (Abigail)

Abigail was a second year seminarian at One Spirit Interfaith Seminary (OSIS). When I met her, she had six months to go before graduation—class of 2009. When the assistant dean of the OSIS spiritual direction program gave me the original assignment of volunteer subjects (directees), it was four persons: one from an Orthodox Jewish background, one from a Catholic background, one from a Presbyterian background, and another from a Jewish background who was not strict and was also involved in a number of other spiritual practices. The fourth subject (Jewish) dropped out of the program after the third session. From that point onwards, it would be the Orthodox Jew and the two Christians until I got a replacement, and I did. She also happened to be Jewish, I had informed all of the volunteers that I am Muslim. Two Jewish subjects withdrew. That set my mind to wondering.

One of the first things that I thought about was the Middle East conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis, which is often translated into Arab and Jewish or Muslim and Jewish conflict. Even though Abigail, one of the original volunteer subjects, is not an Israeli who resides in the Middle East, and I am not an Arab, Palestinian, Middle Easterner or North African, I was a little concerned about how our sessions might unfold and develop—that is, if Abigail would stay the course. Might she drop out as well?

It may be that my concerns arose out of an incident that took place while I was studying in the OSIS interfaith ministry program. One of the Jewish males in my study group said to me, “Before meeting you, I was very afraid of Muslims, but you have put me at ease.” His remark, though gentle, honest and apparently sincere, stunned me a little. The only response I could come up with was, “I’m glad that I allayed your fears.” In retrospect, I was not sure if he was speaking of Middle Eastern Muslims or Muslims from the Nation of Islam, a member of which I am neither. He and I never spoke of the matter again.

My classmate, like so many Americans and non Muslims, know so little about Islam and they are heavily influenced by the media and the general discord on the religion, especially as it is portrayed by extremists. They, are unaware that every Muslim is not Arab, and every Arab is not Muslim—some are Christian; that the conflict is over territory, not a religious war, somewhat similar to the conflict over the territory of Kashmir between India and Pakistan, and that the world-wide Muslim population includes different races, cultures and ethnicities, as well as converts such as myself—who happen to be African American.

I decided to quiet the chattering monkeys and not distress myself with imaginings. I approached my very first session with her with an open mind and an honest heart, filled with enthusiasm and intention to offer my service and, if needed, to be available to provide it. From the moment Abigail and I began to talk, everything seemed to flow and fall into place. We both told each other a little about ourselves and our faiths as a getting-to-know-you start, and Abigail told me that she looked forward to the sessions and what would unfold. The conflict of the Middle East never came up, and Abigail

never expressed any fear of Muslims. Each session progressed smoothly and seamlessly from the beginning to the end of the six-month project. The total openness and relaxation between us rendered the process flawless.

Abigail's major concerns revolved around her offspring; her health; her finances; stress on a job that she thinks that she is good at but she really does not enjoy (the legal profession), and her want of a love relationship, after being divorced for three years—the two latter issues apparent in almost every session.

At the conclusion of our six months together, she realized that she was rushing the love relationship and decided to exercise more patience so that she would find the right relationship and not one out of desperation. She also decided not to fight the powers that be on the job, to see things as they are, to weigh her options and to move along to do what she has to do to change her circumstances. She said she “had an internal shift” after she returned to the concept of prayer and the concept of wisdom—from the Torah. Reflection and questioning may have helped also. For example: When she said that she was being treated badly on her job, I said, “You say that they are treating you badly. Why do you think they are treating you this way?” Her answer was, “They treat everyone this way.” Perhaps the reflection and question helped her realize that this was the *modus operandi* of the department, and not directed only towards her. When she did not get the response she had hoped for from the two gentlemen who lived out of state (Washington State and California), I mentioned that “long-distance relationships can sometimes be challenging”, and it was good that she realized things were not working out before she relocated from the East to the West coast.

Abigail often thanked me for my insights, but she always seemed to present scenarios that I responded to spontaneously—without ever thinking about what reflections to offer or what questions to ask. The case that initially raised concern before we had even began, turned out to be a model case—one that addressed my initial concerns, and one that demonstrated very clearly to me the effectiveness of a Muslim spiritual director in a multifaith context. The previous experience that I had with my fellow Jewish seminarian caused me to wonder if Abigail would also withdraw as the two other Jewish subjects had. Her genuine eagerness and enthusiasm erased my concerns immediately. Sessions with her helped me to witness the process in action. With our faith traditions fully in view, we entered the process with open hearts, both of us fully aware of what and who we are.

In spiritual direction training we are taught to pray or meditate before our sessions, asking God, the Divine Source, to work through us, that we do no harm and for a good meeting between the energies and spirits of the director and the directee.

Summary (Alisha)

Alisha was my mentee for two years as she went through the interfaith ministry program at OSIS. Our two-year relationship progressed very well, up to Alisha's graduation from OSIS in 2008. A few months afterwards, she returned to her home state of Rhode Island. We said that we would stay in touch. I contacted her six months later and asked her if she, as a Buddhist, would be interested in being a volunteer subject (directee) for my multifaith spiritual direction project and she agreed to do so.

Alisha is a Zen Buddhist of the Mahayana sect from Korea. She lived exclusively in a Buddhist community center in New England until her marriage. Now she rotates

between the center and her new home. At the center, she is in charge of the kitchen and the office. She lived and worked in New York City for five years, the last year in a non-Buddhist communal center.

Alisha discussed concerns and issues with me that she had never mentioned during the two years that we were in the mentor-mentee relationship. This may have resulted from the trust that developed between us the two years prior to the spiritual direction sessions.

I chose to include Alisha, a Buddhist, to be a part of the project because I anticipated that having sessions with her, as a non-theistic person, would be very different from the subjects of the three Abrahamic traditions. Aside from the fact that God is not a part of her language and I was cognizant of that, it turned out that the sessions were not so drastically different. She talked about her Buddhist practice as part of her challenge, and also spoke of a number of other concerns that were non religious or faith oriented, but perhaps spiritually related or spiritual in nature—much in the same ways as the other subjects who believe that God is their source.

Alisha had quite a number of things going on in her life. Most of it revolved around the “uniqueness of Buddhist thought.” She had given up most of her personal interests and pleasures in dedication to her Buddhist practice and her work at the Zen center where she resides. She admitted that doing the two jobs (kitchen and office) and keeping up with her practice is very demanding and challenging. She admitted that at times she finds it all stressful and exhausting. Alisha took on the office job that her friend and former director of the center left open, and she assumed the role because she believed she knew how to do it well. She thought of asking for the director’s position,

but didn't since that would be ego—something that must be kept in check in her Zen practice. She believed that the head teacher (monk) of the center did not want her to have the position because he could not bully her. She also believed that he did not recognize all of her hard work, but she again realized that that too was her ego getting in the way—a behavior that is not favored in her Zen practice. It seemed that aside from her challenges with work and practice, she was also struggling with her ego.

Alisha took a little break from the center for rest and relaxation because, as she put it, she “hit a wall.” However, she felt guilty because she took some time off for herself—over indulgence in the self is not looked upon favorably either. She was overworking and putting in a lot of time with her Buddhist practice because she thought it would give her good karma—good reward and consequences; however, she was doing it at the expense of giving up all of her personal time. She also knew that, when she was not at the Zen center, she was drinking and smoking too much, and needed to do something about it even though there was not much else to do where she resides, except drink and party. I did point out that it was good that she realized that she needed to do something about it—that being aware and knowing is the first step to making the change.

Her friend and former director of the center committed suicide. He had dedicated fifteen years of his life to the center without ever taking a vacation. In contrast, one of the Zen masters was taking a vacation to Korea in spite of short staffing at the center. We discussed that her friend's burnout and suicide may have been the result of his extreme dedication and lack of self care. On the other hand, the Zen master was taking a vacation and taking care of himself in spite of the short staffing and all the work to be done at the center.

Alisha said attending to her work at the center and with her Buddhist practice keeps her out of trouble (drinking and smoking, which she is not allowed to do at the center). Even when she visits her mother and stepfather, there are martinis around. She mentioned the tendency to drink when she visits with them and also the use of alcohol in her family. Her oldest sister died as a result of alcohol abuse; her biological father was mean and abusive to her sister, and her mother drinks as a result of the guilt she felt for not being more protective. Alisha and her mother drink socially when they are together.

After her friend's suicide, Alisha went on a five-day silent retreat. She had time to think about her late friend, telling herself that he did not have a life. She also realized that she was giving up her life to the center. She began to spend more time with family and friends, and suddenly decided to marry "an old flame", with whom she planned to buy a house. She said that everything came together for her or culminated at the silent retreat. She had also mentioned during the early sessions that she had no one at the center to talk to about the things that she discussed with me.

Undoubtedly, the silent retreat was extremely helpful. I also think that having the opportunity to talk in session about things that she did not or could not talk about with anyone at the center, provided her an opportunity to hear her own concerns aloud; to have some of her concerns reflected back to her, and to have questions asked of her that she could examine and answer for herself. For instance, one question that I posed to her as she was trying to gain balance in her work and practice at the Zen center and her personal life was: "Do you think that it is okay for you to have a personal life and still do what you have to do in order to get where you want to be in your practice?" The signs, demonstrated the results of the extreme dedication of one man versus the route of self

care that the other took, were there for her to see but holding them up in front of her so that she could get a better perspective was eye opening and a wakeup call for her to find balance between her spiritual and personal lives.

Summary (Cabretta)

Cabretta admitted her lack of confidence, her feelings of inadequacy, not feeling she was enough, her fears, her doubts—all of which seemed to be permeating every area of her life and her very existence. One example was when she wanted to return to the volunteer work at the school but had not heard from the office. Instead of contacting the school to see if she could return for the new school year, she thought because she did not hear from them, they were either dissatisfied with or unappreciative of her work. I asked her if she was planning on calling the school, and also considering other options for volunteer work—like her local hospitals. She ended up getting a volunteer position in one of the hospices, helping the elderly patients to ambulate, and she seemed to be enjoying it from the way in which she described talking to the patients and encouraging them.

Cabretta also feels that she is the least educated in her family and that really carried over to her feelings about herself when she compared herself to her fellow seminarians. She believes that they are all more educated, smarter, more articulate and have bigger plans for themselves and their ministries than she does. She even mentioned wearing one of her husband's bicycle medals to feel better about herself. I pointed out her accomplishments of a long marriage; a son she helped to rear, and who does not give her any major problems; a successful family business that she helped her husband to build, and the book that she co-wrote with her elderly aunt. She said that she had never

looked at herself in that way. I told her that the people in her study group have issues and concerns as well, and that her ministry will unfold—it had already begun with the elderly people that she is helping. She ended up doing a book tour with her aunt. She also managed to speak with her study group during a telephone conference call instead of remaining silent and, though she is a long-distance student, attended class one weekend and connected with her study group members and other students. She even made plans to meet with a few students with whom she formed new relationships, and they all made plans to be together during the year-end initiation retreat.

Cabretta had not been attending Presbyterian services for more than thirty years and, as a result, did not have many opportunities for fellowship and a social life. Following her new volunteer job, her book tour, her connection with her fellow seminarians, she decided to attend Unity Services. Her last session with me ended on a high note.

I provided her the opportunity to voice her fears, patiently listening to her, asking her questions so that she could really look at her set of circumstances and mirroring her concerns to her, helped her to begin facing her fears so that she could emerge from her isolated existence of working from home. She even expressed to me in the last session that she noticed that I left the fixing up to the person. She also said that she experienced a “turn around.”

Cabretta was a good teacher for me. She showed me that I could be concerned for her and stay the course with her, but stay out of the way. I was happy and grateful for the breakthrough that she expressed.

Summary (Doritha)

Doritha and I worked briefly together for about one year. We both left the agency where we were employed—she, about nine months before I did. I contacted her about three years later to ask her if she would be a part of my project and she readily agreed.

Doritha and I had not seen much of each other during our work experience because we shared a full-time job, each working a three-day work week. We saw each other on Wednesdays for the purpose of touching base for updates on our projects. We often had a working lunch in order to make the most of our one common work day. There wasn't much of an opportunity to be friendly on the job.

During the spiritual direction sessions, Doritha spoke of a number of issues that had taken place in her past and also concerns that were unfolding. Doritha informed me that she felt a special bond with me because we share the same religious beliefs and faith, and also because spiritual direction presents her an opportunity to speak about her spiritual life. More importantly, she felt comfortable enough in spiritual direction sessions to share details of her life from sessions one through six that I had no previous knowledge of.

Doritha spoke of a number of issues—the major ones being her fears and lack of confidence; her daughters' sometime disrespectful, impatient and controlling behavior ("just like their father"); her daughters and her former husband telling her she doesn't need a master's degree, which is her dream, and trying to make the decision whether or not to remarry her former husband who has been trying to get her to remarry him for the last ten years, even though she described the relationship as abusive and still subtly controlling. They were divorced twenty years ago. Doritha also talked about being

unemployed, her health, her finances and wanting to put her nursing degree to use. She stated her belief and relationship with Allah (God).

Although she believes that her former husband is not as harsh as he used to be, that he does seem to love and care about her—even offering to pay for her health insurance, she also sees his tendencies towards wrath and control. Recently he has developed the debilitating condition of Parkinson's. She expressed that she is very conflicted with the idea of returning to him, in part, because she thinks that it would be the right thing for her to help him, even though she knows she would completely give up her life to him; that he would still be controlling. She also expressed that she belongs to him, and if she returned, it would be out of loyalty.

Doritha said that her lack of self confidence and fears arose from mistakes that she made when she was young; comparing herself to a sister who she believed to be smarter than she, and a husband she always believed to be intellectually superior to her. Even though she has done many things well in her life, she still becomes paralyzed by her fears and low self worth. While pursuing a master's degree is one of her dreams, her daughter and former husband tell her she does not need it, she is too old, and question what she would do with it. I asked her to do an exercise between sessions: To ask herself what Allah (God) is showing to her and expects of her centered around the issue of fear and lack of confidence.

In the midst of it all, she never forgot God, prayer and the faith that give her the strength to face her fears and concerns. Among a few important things she said of spiritual direction sessions, she mentioned that they helped her to put things in perspective, and that helps her to cope with them better, even if she had not found

resolutions for them. She also said that spiritual direction is a gentle and subtle guidance that helps a person find her own truth. She did not repeat the question that I asked her about God's expectation of her around the issue of fear, but when she came to the following session, she said that God wants her to trust.

Her statements at the last of the six sessions accurately described some of the goals and objectives of spiritual direction—to guide a person to find her own truth; to help the directee to put things into perspective, and to have trust in God. She realized, and I witnessed, that a change had occurred, and that she had taken steps towards healing.

Doritha's case was one where I, as a Muslim woman in spiritual direction with a Muslim woman, had to guard against counter transference—placing myself in her position or experiencing her painful experiences. This is not meant, in any way, to imply that I would not feel the same empathy or be at risk for counter transference or a similar situation with a non Muslim woman. These thoughts and feelings that surfaced for me in this particular instance may have arisen because of the subject matter that was discussed in Chapter 4, "Women in Islam". What is important here is that the spiritual director is taught to be aware of the thoughts and feelings that she experiences as she is in session with her directees. Recognizing her own human emotions helps to guard against becoming overly involved in the directee's experience, and also frees her to be fully present in the session for the benefit of the directee.

Summary(Emma)

Emma's primary concerns revolved around finding ways to balance life with her two daughters at home and the one away at college; work and seminary studies; fellowship and her responsibilities at Unity; finding time for herself—quiet time for

meditation and prayer; exercise time for walks and yoga, and empowering her daughters to be self reliant yet team players. When I asked her if she had any help and what the family thought of all that she was doing, she responded, “Oh, my daughters and I work as a team.” She did not mention a mate or other family member. I sensed that she was not telling me something. Our spiritual direction teachers said that this happens sometime. I made a note of my feeling, filed it and decided to see what would unfold.

As the sessions progressed, Emma opened up gradually. She talked about her family life growing up, her change in denominations from Catholic to Unity and Quaker services, and how she was working on herself to overcome some of the challenges she met in her childhood, such as her brothers being treated better than she had been; learning how to be less critical of and more loving towards herself; learning how to speak up for herself without hurting others and using the words of naysayers to motivate herself.

By the fourth session, Emma said that her husband had finally moved out—“made the physical move.” She said that it was something that she prayed would happen peacefully and uneventfully. She said she had put all of her faith and trust in God for the first time. Apparently, she felt comfortable enough in our relationship by this time to share this part of her journey with me. In addition, she dealt with major events over a one-year period; sending her oldest daughter away to college; losing her mother to cancer; estrangement and eventually separation from her husband, and taking on the added responsibility of a new puppy. She had begun to doubt if she could be a good minister, and was thinking of foregoing the second year of seminary. She said that she was holding on to her faith and spiritual practice in the midst of it all. God loomed large in her life.

Emma missed the sixth and final session and, though she was offered to make it up, she said that there was too much going on in her life, and she was satisfied with the work that we had done together. In her evaluation, she mentioned her initial caution and that validated the feeling I had in the beginning. Ours was a dance of feeling each other out—I did not press or push for information. The more relaxed I was, the more she seemed to relax, open up and trust the process. It was an example of caution turned into trust. We both let the process unfold—each trusting ourselves, each other and, ultimately, God, who is atop the triangle—the three sides of the triangle.

Another thing that is important to mention about Emma: In our early sessions, she talked about fighting discrimination in the school where she teaches. I had mentioned to her in our getting-to-know you session that I am a Muslim. She told me that Islam is a very misunderstood religion and that I must experience that a lot. I told her that it is not on an everyday personal basis on my part, but it is always in the media.

I chose not to go into detail about how people sometimes respond to me when I do say that I am Muslim—often assuming that, as an African American, I am Christian, or if I am a Muslim, I must belong to the Nation of Islam. I think that it was especially perceptive of her to say what she said to me. It demonstrated her effort to reach out, and to share a heartfelt moment with me, which was very special to me.

Summary (Lawissa)

Lawissa was the third volunteer following the two who had withdrawn. Therefore, she did not have the full six sessions—in fact, only four. She was fairly open to begin with.

Although her father was a Presbyterian minister, Lawissa knows nothing of the religion because she, her parents and siblings stopped attending church very early on. After I explained spiritual direction and the basic format of the sessions, she told me the different names that she calls God—Source, Ground of Being and God. She said that after she heard me speak of Islam on a panel and experienced the Sufis and the *zikr* (chanting the names of Allah, and words to Allah), she thinks that Allah is one of the most beautiful names of God, and she repeated it over and over again for days afterwards. I was surprised at the response that she described, but I said nothing of it. Lawissa said she belongs to no formal tradition, but practices meditation with the Theraveda Buddhists. She likes interfaith because there are so many ways to approach God.

Lawissa talked about sleeping a lot because of feeling a spiritual energy flowing through her body and vibrating in her hands, causing her to tremble. I asked her if she discussed it with her personal physician. She said that she would not be comfortable discussing something like that with her doctor. I sensed that it would be best not to press the issue further at that time. She did say that she had an appointment for a physical examination because the fatigue she suffered made it difficult to have a normal work life. Since she said that she lives alone and is unemployed, I thought it was safe to ask her if all of this is impacting her financially. She said that with a combination of her savings, unemployment insurance and help from her father, she gets by. She was looking for a suitable, less stressful nursing job. Since she is also an artist, I mentioned that she might use her gift to generate income—a gift and talent from God, perhaps provided to help her to take care of herself in a less strenuous way. When we ended the session, she said, “We’ve done some good work here today.”

Lawissa shared with me that she visited a mosque as part of her seminary assignment. She said that she liked the *Adhan* (*the Islamic call to prayer*). She also mentioned that everyone was African American, and she was the only Caucasian present. She said that everyone was very friendly to her. I expressed that I was glad to hear that she had a pleasant experience. She posed the question, “Isn’t it something how we have preconceived ideas and live by them?” I responded, “Yes,” deeming it appropriate to give a one-word response. Better judgment dictates that a spiritual director would best avoid a discussion on topics such as social affairs, race, politics and —especially as they pertain to the socio-political arena. Such subject matter can be risky, leading to hurt feelings and misunderstandings.

In our fourth and final session, Lawissa reported that she found two jobs that would be suitable to her energy level and schedule. She was very happy. At her request, we discussed how she progressed from the person who had low energy, spoke in a breathless whisper, and was jobless to the person who speaks in a more audible voice, sounds more energetic, has employment and sounds more excited. She told me that she developed a connection with me and felt more grounded. She also said, “It feels good to trust God.” I sometimes say in session, “Trust!” or “Trust the process.” Lawissa also said to me, “You verbalize what’s in my head.” She was talking about the mirroring or reflecting technique.

Lawissa expressed two important things: that God was present in the midst of everything she had been going through, and also that reflection was helpful to her. In her evaluation she stated that she “really felt the presence of God in our last session.” One of the things about Lawissa that really caught my attention was the fact that she adheres to

no one faith tradition, borrows from a few, and speaks often of God. Feeling the presence of God in a session—it doesn't get better than that.

Summary(Roberta)

Roberta and I also worked together as nurses a number of years ago. I was her supervisor. She was a serious worker, always on time and up to the task at hand. Other than that, I knew nothing of her or her family life. She was a very private person. I did not even know her faith tradition at that time. We no longer worked together since 2001, the time at which I left that particular work environment. In late 2008, I contacted Roberta to ask if she would take part in my multifaith project as a volunteer subject. She welcomed and accepted the offer.

Roberta's initial concern was that she had no rituals in her life that connected her to God. She was at odds with her desire to hold on to the Apostolic beliefs because they connected her with her past and her family, but she didn't like the hypocrisy of the prosperity gospel that has arisen from the concept of tithing. She also referred to her aunt as the holy sinner (who said one thing and did another). In addition, she did not want to commit—be saved because she did not think she could live up to what is required of her, and she did not want to be a back slider. She had a job she did not like, but could not afford to lose; she wanted to buy a home, but was afraid to take that step for fear she might have lost her job and her investment on the house. She had two episodes of clairaudience—both revolving around the issue of purchasing a home. She had never had this experience before beginning the spiritual direction sessions. Even though I have experienced it myself, I had no explanation for her,

One of the very first things that Roberta shared with me in the very first session was that she had no rituals that connected her with God. When I asked her to explain, she said that she did not attend church services. When I asked if she said her prayers and grace or a blessing before her meals, she said that she does. I informed her that those were rituals that connect her to God. She seemed surprised and pleased with that perspective.

I informed Roberta, as I had done with the other directees, that I converted from Christianity to Islam. She asked me what the differences are. I told her that the major difference is that Muslims believe that Jesus is a messenger and prophet of God and is the son of Mary; he is neither believed to be the son of God or God. She asked, "If you don't believe that Jesus is God, how can you lead me to him?" I was not sure if that would be the beginning and end of our sessions. However, I explained to her that my role and responsibility as a spiritual director was to provide the service of listening, non judgment, questioning and reflecting as ways of helping her to look at her thoughts, the issues in her life, her inner self; how she responds, how she would like to respond, and how she would like her life to be. As spiritual director I was also able to witness the tools (ideas) that she might come up with, and how she could use them to make the changes that she wanted, including to whom and where she wanted to travel, and then to point those things out to her if she did not see them herself. I also explained that my role was that of companion and guide, somewhat like the train conductor who is with you until you reach your stop, but he does not disembark with the passenger. It was up to her to reach her destination.

Roberta also made the comment more than once, "We are all sinners." I had heard the Christian concept that "We are all born in sin!" I suppose that was the basis for

her statement. The Islamic concept is the opposite. Muslims believe that one always strives to reach the state of higher mind or higher consciousness—*fitra* or *fitrah*, which refers to “primordial nature.”¹⁸⁹ Also, “There is a Hadith which says that children are born into the world possessing the *fitrah*, or a primordial conformity with truth; then their parents turn them into Jews, Christians and Muslims; that is, they acquire a way of being.”¹⁹⁰

Roberta shared a number of her innermost thoughts and concerns. She completed the six monthly sessions, expressing that she looked forward to each one and wished that the project had been longer. She verbally expressed the changes that she saw in herself, and she also stated that she had given more thought to her spiritual life. That certainly was a change considering what she had related at her first session. She said that the spiritual direction sessions have helped her to look more closely at herself; get her concerns out of her head, pay more attention to the rituals in her life that connect her to God. Even though she does not go to church; she is more interested in and pays closer attention to religion and strives to be more Christ like. Based on the question that Roberta asked me about Jesus in our first session and her attendance at subsequent sessions, culminating in completion of the process, it is apparent that we developed a level of respect and understanding.

¹⁸⁹ Cyril Glasse, *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam: Revised Edition* (London, W8 4BH: Stacy International, 2001), 142.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

GENERAL SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Although the three Abrahamic traditions were chosen and included in the project for their similarities and differences, they are all theistic and monotheistic traditions in varying degrees. As mentioned, a Buddhist subject was added to the equation because the practice is not amongst the traditionally theistic faiths, and also to demonstrate a contrast between believers of theism and non theism.

The subjects that were assigned to this project by OSIS were Jewish and Christian, except for the second and final replacement (Case #6) for the two who withdrew—she adheres to no tradition, and borrows from a few. Consequently, an interspiritual subject (Case #6) was added to the mix without plan. There was no Muslim or Buddhist available from the OSIS program. Therefore, the Buddhist (Case #2), an OSIS alum, and the Muslim (Case #4) were invited into the project. A third individual, the Apostolic Christian (Case #7) was also invited to participate. She was thought to be a good candidate because she, like the Orthodox Jew, had not taken on another denomination or sect of her religion nor a conversion to another faith. Case # 3 is the Presbyterian who has practiced yoga and meditation for thirty-five years and now attends a Unity church, and Case # 5, is the former Catholic who belongs to a Unity church or center and also attends Quaker services.

Taking into consideration that the participants, including the spiritual director, in this project, view God in various ways or in no way at all, there are a number of ways in which to view the sessions between a Muslim spiritual director and non Muslim directees. Any one series of sessions can be reviewed for the effectiveness of interfaith or interspiritual spiritual direction between Muslim director and non Muslim directee, but

the sessions between the Muslim director and the Muslim directee can also be reviewed as a contrast to all of the others.

In the sessions between the Muslim directee and the Jewish directee (Case# 1), there were brief exchanges regarding God, prayer and Holy Scriptures—namely the Quran and the Torah. The director and directee, each from an Abrahamic tradition, share a view of God as indescribable and without image, and also a God to whom one can go to without an interceder, and have a direct relationship.

In the series of sessions between the Muslim director who is theistic, and the Buddhist directee (Case #2) who is non theistic, there was also exchange, but not about God and prayer. For example, the Muslim director referred to the inner jihad or inner war, the turmoil one experiences when trying to do what is correct to live up to her tradition and practice. The Buddhist directee referred to the war within. She also discussed the Eightfold Path or right ways of life that a Buddhist must follow and live by.

The Presbyterian directee (Case #3) who has not been to a church in thirty years, and now attends a Unity church, had stopped using the term God, but always believed God to be the Christ within. The Muslim director, on the other hand, used the term God to refer to the Divine. Near the end of the project, the directee said she now feels more comfortable saying God and has decided to return the term to her vocabulary because God is the common denominator. Although she considers herself a Christian, I noticed that she did not mention Jesus— the Christ within, but not Jesus.

The Muslim director and the Muslim directee (Case #4) used the same terminology, Allah, to refer to God. It was uttered automatically, and it is only in retrospect that this realization occurred.

The directee who was reared Catholic (Case #5), but is a member of a Unity church and also attends Quaker services, used the term God. She did not refer to Jesus or the Christ within.

The directee who has no tradition (Case #6), often referred to God, but she did not mention Jesus or Christ. She also had other names by which she referred to God, such as Source and Ground of Being. She said that she considers the term Allah to be one of the most beautiful names of God.

The Apostolic Christian directee (Case #7) believes in Jesus, but once she asked me the question, “If you don’t believe Jesus is God, how then can you lead me to him,” never said anything further about Jesus and used the term God thereafter. I thought that she would be the one to refer to Jesus. She did say that she was striving to be more Christ like.

Although spiritual direction is not solely for the purpose of discussing religious beliefs, but rather one’s relationship with the divine as it impacts the spiritual and mundane existence of the individual, religious beliefs and practices can emerge in a session. In this particular project, it did occur across faiths lines. The Muslim director and the Jewish directee discussed their beliefs and practices openly, and discussion regarding concepts and ways of life took place between the Muslim director and the Buddhist directee. In the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, God was mentioned and, as Cabretta (Case #3) said, God was (is) the common denominator. In all cases there was a demonstration that each directee had something in common with the director and vice versa.

Providing spiritual direction services was as much of a journey for me as it was for the directees. It was significantly effective across faith traditions, as well as rewarding and satisfying to me, the spiritual director. I brought to each directee and each experience the intention to serve without an agenda to change or fix anyone; to do no harm; to be available, present and attentive; to be caring and compassionate, and to listen. I also brought that which is unique as a Muslim spiritual director, which is centered on the teaching of the Quran. While it may be a duty and a requirement for Muslims to invite non Muslims into the faith of Islam, it is also a duty and a requirement that Muslims remember the words and guidance of the Holy Quran: “Allah (God separated us into tribes and nations so that we may know each other.”(Quran 49:13).

An interfaith or multifaith approach does not mean that one has to give up who or what she or he is, or that the other person has to do so. Learning about each other, getting to know each other and understanding each other can decrease religious arrogance and conflict, ultimately leading us to peaceful co-existence. My major goal in spiritual direction is to be a companion and guide to a person on his or her spiritual journey up to a point where that directee is ready to journey on her or his own.

Muslims are to remember not to use force or harsh persuasion when practicing with other Muslims or when discussing religion with non Muslims. This would include spiritual direction or spiritual guidance: “O People of the Book. Commit no excess in your religion” (Quran 4:17). The Quran also states: “God has designated for everyone a law and a way of life... Your goal is God” (Quran 5:48).

If God designated for everyone a law and a way of life, would that not include all humankind? If the goal is God, or that which manifests itself as attributes of God, Higher

Consciousness or Enlightenment, should there be question or strife concerning who assists anyone in reaching her or his goal to live a spiritually balanced life?

Bearing in mind the teaching of spiritual direction, I bring that which is required of a spiritual director—presence, acceptance, non-judgment and deep, compassionate listening. The qualities of openness—an open heart, an open mind and acceptance, are also requirements that I bring as well. These are also teachings of Islam. The uniqueness that I bring as a Muslim spiritual director who serves in an interfaith and multifaith context is the documentation in the Holy Quran that serves to substantiate and remind us that the goal is God or fitra—the highest state of consciousness. It is a way of life that is available to all people, without regard to race, color, nation, tribe, language or religion.

Spiritual direction sessions were apparently helpful to all of the subjects. Abigail (Case #1) stated that she had an internal shift; Alisha (Case #2) stated that it was really something to face her concerns, and decide to handle them differently; Cabretta (Case #3) said that she had a “turnaround”; Doritha (Case #4) said that she was able to put her issues into perspective, and that made them seem more manageable; Emma (Case #5) who seemed to be extremely cautious in the very beginning, was more open and trusting closer to the end; Lawissa (Case #6), who asked if I saw any progress she had made from the first to the fourth session because she did not, was able to answer her own question when it was reflected back to her. In addition, she said that she felt “the presence of God in the last session.” Roberta (Case #7) who thought she had no spiritual practice or ritual that connected her to God because she did not attend church, was very pleased to be told that her prayers and grace before meals were rituals from which she could begin to build

that connection. In addition, she said that the sessions helped her to talk the problems out of her head, and that made them seem less bad.

All of the subjects, even before they completed the evaluations or wrote their statements, verbally expressed appreciation and gratitude that they had the option and the opportunity to take part in the spiritual direction project as well as to have someone to talk to.

In spite of contrasts and differences, most faith traditions have common threads that weave them together into a quilt - separate patches and sections, but connected nonetheless—a founder, messenger or prophet; Holy Scriptures or Sacred Texts, and guidelines for a way of life to adhere to for a connection and relationship with one's Divine Source, higher consciousness, inner being or universal law, no doubt with intention for humankind to live in balance and harmony with their surroundings—fellow human beings, other creatures, the earth and the universe.

Faith traditions aside for a moment, all of the directees were striving to create balance in their worlds—their mundane and spirituals lives. They were looking for answers to questions within themselves, and found a few; sometimes trying to solve mysteries for which they have not yet found solutions. Most of them, in spite of any hardships they were experiencing, often mentioned God—one said that she trusts God; another said that she gave thanks, even through tears.

One of the things that I had hoped would happen in the project that did not happen was more face-to-face contact, but I had to work with what was available to me, which was an assignment of directees who are or were distant learners or had schedules that did

not allow for face-to-face sessions. After the first few sessions, we became used to it, and things worked out fairly well, taking everything into consideration.

The project was successful because it was carried out as planned and progressed rather smoothly once the first two subjects withdrew. In addition, I went through my own spiritual direction and supervision, and the directees received the type of service that I like to receive: availability, presence, attentiveness, caring, compassion, a sense of confidentiality and safety, honest intention, kindness, patience, and unconditional love and acceptance.

Some errors were made: forgetting to ask a directee if I could share a story; not being cautious about self disclosure, and going over time in sessions, which is taught not to be a good practice (one must pay attention to self care). One must remember that she is human and not perfect; that she can learn from her mistakes and most importantly mistakes do not make the session or process unsuccessful. God is perfect, and God is in charge—not the spiritual director.

What I hoped for and expected to happen was that the service I offered would make a positive difference in the lives of the people I served. For the most part that happened, especially based on documentation of the evaluative feedback and written statements.

What I did not expect was that the Buddhist subject (Case #2) sometimes felt that I did not understand her because of what she stated to be “the uniqueness of Buddhist thought.” I think, based on what she was expressing as her challenges, I understood far greater than she thought I did. Perhaps her feelings were more of an assumption on her part. Maybe the challenge that she was dealing with in terms of seeking balance in her

practice, work and life in general, was a projection of her own feelings to me, especially as a convert to Buddhism.

I did not expect that the interspiritual subject (Case #6) would take aversion to the collection of data, as indicated in her evaluation, but I do understand that some people are very private, and I respect that.

Overall, the positive response that was received from directees, was beyond my expectations. In addition, I learned from my spiritual director—her quiet reserve and her peaceful presence; and I learned from my supervisor—the gentle approach of her corrections and constructive criticism, but I did not expect that I would learn so much about myself from the very questions I often posed to the directees: “What is God showing you or expects from you around the issue of...?” “Why do you think this is happening to you?” Also, “Where is God in this equation?” The directees perform quiet and unspoken roles of director similar to the teacher student relationship—the spiritual director can learn from them as well, and also learn about herself in the process. As they grew, changed and transformed in certain areas, I also grew and transformed (see transformation in Chapter 9).

CHAPTER 7 EVALUATION

A brief evaluation of my own experience in the spiritual direction process with a multifaith context revealed to me that I felt a connection with each directee, and her faith tradition was not the focal point of our sessions. The one Muslim directee and I spoke freely of the beliefs that we hold in common, but it was without conscious effort—no different from two people who speak the same language and automatically speak to each other in their native or mother tongue. However, I had equally valuable experiences with the Jewish directee who was reared and educated in orthodox environments; the Buddhist who does not include God in her language; the directees who were reared in Christian homes and also found satisfaction outside of the denominations under which they were reared—a Presbyterian who studied Hinduism for thirty-five years, practices yoga, meditation and attends Unity services; one who was reared as a Catholic, who practices yoga, meditation and attends Quaker and Unity services; another who was reared in the Apostolic faith, but does not attend church *and* questioned, “How can you, a Muslim, lead me to Jesus?” Another directee has no faith, but borrows from a number of them. Each brought her own unique and special qualities to the sessions, and all of them together wove a unique fabric from common threads.

Every single concern and issue could not be addressed and resolved in a six-month project, yet, the seven volunteer subjects (directees) provided an array of broad

and realistic samples of the concerns and issues in the standard, everyday life—regardless of faith tradition. The common threads between all of the directees were central, and the outcome of the project demonstrates that. The evaluation process and its outcome provide detailed results of the spiritual direction process, and the feedback from the directees expresses thoughts and feelings regarding their experiences during the six-month project.

STATEMENTS SUBMITTED BY DIRECTEES FOR THE ONE SPIRIT INTERFAITH SEMINARY

The statements below are those that were made by the seven volunteer subjects from OSIS who participated in the six-month demonstration project, for the New York Theological Seminary's (NYTS) Doctor of Ministry Program with a Multifaith Context.

Abigail – Case #1

A statement regarding the experience with my spiritual director; experience I had in the spiritual counseling process, and the outcome of the six monthly sessions: Working with Ruqaiyah was helpful to gain a deeper awareness of myself. She is a great listener, very compassionate, and her insights are very wise. This year has been a year of many changes for me, and Ruqaiyah has helped me weather many of the difficult changes by her presence, her listening, and her spiritual awareness.

When I signed up for spiritual counseling, I was somewhat nervous about what the process would be like. Ruqaiyah made me feel very comfortable, accepted and loved. I have a habit of being hard on myself, and Ruqaiyah's compassion helped me become kinder and gentler with myself. I looked forward to each one of our sessions.

Alisha – Case #2

I met Ruqaiyah in my first year of seminary as she was chosen to be my mentor. She was a wonderful mentor for me as I had recently struggled with a relationship with a Muslim man who was on the dogmatic side; Ruqaiyah helped me to understand a more spiritual side of Islam through her open mind and honest curiosity of my own spiritual path and beliefs. Just before our spiritual counseling sessions began, I had a dramatic change in my life as I moved from New York City back to my home town to live in the Providence Zen Center. During our counseling sessions, Ruqaiyah helped me to sort through some of the major issues I had at the beginning of my move, and as my situation seemed to grow in complexity (something I certainly hadn't expected with a move from the city to a Zen center), she helped me to stay in contact with the simple teachings of my faith tradition. These changes were not every day ones, but life altering changes such as my marriage and the suicide of my supervisor and friend. She asked poignant questions and listened quietly. I don't believe that I can fully assess the outcome of our sessions, as I know that when I look back later on I will understand that she had helped me more than I can fully appreciate now.

The outcome of the monthly sessions is that I have become a lot clearer about the role of the ministry. Thank you, Ruqaiyah!

Cabretta – Case #3

My relationship to Ruqaiyah Nabe began with my asking her many questions about how we would proceed with our sessions. She clearly explained the format, and we proceeded from there. We discussed my experience with OSIS and how I was doing with that, and the areas in which I may have had difficulties in the course. Ruqaiyah was

able to guide me through the rough spots in a very loving and understanding manner.

Being that she had been through the same process I was undergoing, she was able to offer caring guidance that gave me hope and a few laughs as well.

The counseling process was as good as it could be considering we only had phone sessions, without having met in person. Still, Ruqaiyah helped push me forward from a place where I felt stuck. I feel our sessions have made a huge difference in my social and spiritual life. The spiritual counseling process was a great adjunct to my ministry training as it was useful to have an experience whose techniques may come in handy for me in the future. She helped me to feel more connected to OSIS in a way that a distance learner may not otherwise be able to experience.

I feel that Ruqaiyah put me at ease with her easygoing nature, which allowed me to open up and discuss my life frankly with her. I feel the outcome of our sessions was positive and helpful to me. Ruqaiyah was able to bring me out of myself and connect more deeply with the world around me. I wish her the best of luck in her spiritual counseling career. I am certain that with her interfaith approach she will inspire many clients into a happier state of mind.

Doritha – Case #4

My experience with my spiritual counselor was a very positive one from the very beginning. After a prior explanation of the procedures, I welcomed the opportunity to trust the process of self examination and to trust my listening guide. My counselor became the quiet witness to my life stories and the mirror of my notions, perceptions and issues. With perceptive insight, she guided me back to my own spoken words and truths.

My experience with the spiritual counseling process offered me an ample and penetrating examination of my life issues with the Spirit/Soul components always ever present in our sessions. I experienced an “emptying out”, if you will, of my being, and received a sense of renewed hope and fresh inspiration.

The outcome of the six-month sessions are subtle and rich, and my daily life is now governed with a greater sense of self-awareness, self love, understanding, discernment, appreciation, and humbleness.

I am grateful to have participated in this project, and thank you very much for the offering.

Emma – Case #5

I started the counseling sessions somewhat reluctantly because the times available for sessions were not the most convenient for me. I decided to take the chance and commit to the sessions, curious to see what might unfold.

Ruqaiyah Nabe was my spiritual counselor and, although it was difficult to initially feel connected through phone sessions, I always got the sense that Ruqaiyah was creating the space for Spirit to enter. There were a few places where one can openly and honestly discuss life experiences and their connection to one’s spiritual journey. I was grateful for that opportunity. Ruqaiyah would listen, but also was able to ask the leading questions that would allow me to look a bit more deeply or to see a situation through another lens. This is a gift that Ruqaiyah is able to share.

Lawissa – Case #6

My experience as a counselee of Ruqaiyah Nabe: Working with Ruqaiyah was a real pleasure. She created a space of non judgment and openness within which our

conversations could take place. By the end of our time (which was less than six sessions), I truly felt the presence of a higher power joining us in our efforts at understanding. Throughout our time together, I was going through a difficult economic time as I was unemployed. I am now beginning to get work again. I don't know if the counseling sessions played a part in this turn around, but Ruqaiyah was there to listen and walk with me through that time. That sure was of good benefit to me.

Roberta – Case #7

The spiritual counseling experience has been a real eye opener for me. Although I was open to the counseling experience, I did not know what to expect. Ruqaiyah put me completely at ease, and I felt safe sharing with her my innermost thoughts, feelings and experiences. She was able to help steer me in the direction I needed to go without being overbearing. Ruqaiyah helped me to realize that I was more spiritual than I knew, and to appreciate my faith based rituals.

The six monthly sessions went by very quickly, and I looked forward to each one. I definitely have grown, not only spiritually, but emotionally and as a human being during the last six months. I am thankful for the experience.

In addition to the above statements, feedback and response from the seven volunteer subjects can be found in the results from the evaluation questionnaires that they completed (See Appendix C).

SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS

Overall, the seven volunteer subjects (directees) report satisfaction and positive results from the spiritual direction process. Their response and statements demonstrate a very good outcome for the ministry and practice of spiritual direction in general and for

interfaith, multifaith, interspiritual spiritual direction in particular. The positive response to the sessions resulted in a very good outcome for the Muslim spiritual director who offered spiritual direction to Muslim and non Muslim seekers (directees).

Prior to the plan of implementation, the candidate undergoes an assessment of ministerial competencies. The purpose of the assessment of competencies is to measure the candidate's areas of strength and areas that may require honing for an effective ministry. The site team assists in the process.

Originally there were eight site team members for the demonstration project, "Faith to Faith: Spiritual Direction with a Multifaith Context." Three persons either withdrew from the team or did not participate in the competency assessments. Of the five who completed them, four did it with me and one did it without me, returning it to me by mail.

The list of competencies and the results from the five persons who completed them are as follows:

1.	Knowledge/Appreciation own faith	2 develop	3 continue
2.	Knowledge/Appreciation other faiths	5 continue	
3.	Ability...dialogue	4 continue	1 develop
4.	Ability to interpret sacred texts	1 start,	2 continue, 2 develop
5.	Ability as a worship leader	3 development	2, continue
6.	Ability to be transformative	2 development	3 continue
7.	Ability as a multi-faith leader	5 continue	
8.a.	Ability as multi-faith educator	1 develop	4 continue
9.a.	Ability as counselor – multifaith context	1 develop	3 continue, 1(adult-continue/child-

			develop
8.b.	Pastor	4 no basis	1 develop
9b.	Spiritual Leader	1 develop	4 continue
10.	Ecumenist	4 continue	1 continue developing
11.	Witness/Evangelist	2 no basis	3 continue
12.	Administrator	5 continue	
13.	Professional	5 continue	

At times there was difficulty determining meaning and clarity for some of the items – on my part as well as on the part of the site team members. There are cases where some assessors know me better than others do, or know me in non-ministerial capacities that apply (or can apply) to the duties of a minister.

Based on the results above, I would definitely seek to learn more regarding Sacred Texts/Scriptures (my own as well as others - #4), as to do so would certainly enhance the practice of Spiritual Counseling/Direction. I would also hone my skills as a Worship Leader (#5) because I am a relatively new interfaith minister.

Following the initial attempt to complete the competency assessments, we were requested to choose eight (8) and narrow them down to three or four. Six additional competency areas may be : Knowledge of my own faith tradition – as a convert of Islam, there is always more for me to learn (#1); knowledge of other faiths – there is much more to learn regarding other faith traditions. It is an ongoing process (#2). As I learn more in the multi-faith arena, I will become a better educator, and I will seek special training to deal with children (#8a). As a multi-faith counselor (#9a), my self-perception will be the same as number 8a. While I have no intentions of “pasturing” (8b) a house of worship, in

the future, I may consider a small. I could hone some skills towards that end. If I were to open a center, further development of operating skills would be to my benefit.

Of the eight competencies chosen, it was agreed upon that I will concentrate on seeking additional knowledge and further development of the following four: my own faith tradition (#1); other faith traditions (#2); sacred texts and Scriptures (#4), and counseling – interfaith/interspiritual/multi-faith spiritual direction – (#9a).

Again, based on the results of the assessments with members of the site team, it appears that my strong areas are: ability to dialogue (#3); ability as a multi-faith leader – probably because of my interest and educational pursuit of same (#7); spiritual leader (9b); ecumenist because I enjoy participating in and bringing people of different faith traditions together for interfaith/multifaith events (#10); administrator, because such has been evident in my professional and community work experiences (#12), and professional (#13).

The four ministerial competencies that were chosen, along with the site team, for further development, were: – My own faith tradition (Islam); #1 – Other faith traditions; #2 – Holy Scriptures and Sacred Texts, #4 and Counseling #9a.

Further development of Islam took place because specific information that was required to complete the project had to be uncovered from the Quran, Hadith, Islamic Concordance, Islamic Dictionary and articles. The same applies to the other faith traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism.

Spiritual direction in the Holy Scriptures and Sacred Texts was explored in the Jewish Torah and other Jewish texts, the Christian Bible, the Holy Quran and the Buddhist Dhamapadam.

The project itself was an application of counseling (spiritual direction) techniques, exploration of the process and, consequently, further development of the discipline, ministry and practice.

About two and a half years after completing the Hermeneutical Inventory, the very last section resonates today and, in retrospect, appears as a forecast of the demonstration project that had not yet unfolded:

Where I stand today as a Muslim and a spiritual seeker who respects other faiths, I believe that ALL KNOWLEDGE comes from The Universal Mind of God, including the Sacred (Religious) Texts. In my mind, God revealed various words of spiritual guidance as tools to hone our skills for a relationship with The Divine in the same way that guide books are available to us for all other areas of our lives: psychology, sociology and nutrition are a few. I don't know exactly when this turning point occurred. It seems that as I learn more about myself and get to know myself better, I may have always believed or thought this way to some degree. It just seems to me that a number of religions have fundamental aspects that are the same or similar: A Divine or Higher Power; treating others as we wish to be treated, and helping the less fortunate to name a few. Religious and Sacred Texts provide us channels and routes to find our way to The Divine, to find our purpose and to fulfill our purpose. At this point in my life, I am not positively sure that I know how to prioritize the factors. I see life as a learning continuum. Maybe I will become more certain as I learn more and things become clearer to me. The subject of Hermeneutics is new to me. I have to see what unfolds.

My next steps are to find ways and more time to read, study and pay closer attention to the Sacred (Religious) Texts and their translations and interpretations. From that point onwards, I hope to have a stronger foundation so that I may be able to better interpret Scripture (independently). This class in Hermeneutics will provide me the tools to do this. It is vitally important for my spiritual growth and my evolutionary process as a minister.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Norman K. Gottwald, "Hermeneutical Self Inventory," *New York Theological Seminary*, 1988
– Adapted for a Multifaith Perspective by Lester J. Ruiz, 2007.

Two additional sources that have been more recently helpful with the self inventory and spiritual journey are Ken Wilber’s Integral Operating System (IOS)/Integral Map and David Richo’s shadow work.

The Integral Spirituality Map places into perspective one’s relationship with self and all others. “I can experience my own “I” *from the inside*...included such things as introspection, meditation, phenomenology, contemplation...I can also approach this “I” from the outside...try to “see myself as others see me”)...Likewise, I can approach the study of a “we” from its inside or its outside...From the *inside*...attempts that you and I make to understand each other...”we” *from the outside*, perhaps as a cultural anthropologist...”¹⁹² An example of the integral spirituality map:

Interior	Exterior
(“I”)	(“It”)
(<u>Inside</u>)	(<u>Inside</u>)
Outside	Outside
Subjective	Objective
Inter Subjective	Inter Objective
(“We”)	(“Its”)
Inside	(Inside)
Outside	Outside

Integral Spirituality Map – *Integral Spirituality* by Ken Wilber, pg. 36.

¹⁹² Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality* (Boston, Massachusetts: Integral Books, 2006), 31, 36-37, 39, 204.

The Integral Spirituality Map assists one in returning to her or his source, for example God and location, while also helping one to see the development of her or his evolution or spiritual development and journey, beginning with God, self, family, community, society, country and the world, and including her or his changes in perception and position..

The Shadow Work assists one in looking at both sides of his or her personality, gaining some sense of how perception, behaviors and responses develop, and how they can change and evolve.

According to Jung,

The shadow is the negative side of the personality, the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide...The shadow does not only consist of morally reprehensible tendencies, but also displays a number of good qualities, such as normal instincts, appropriate reactions, realistic insights, creative impulses, etc.¹⁹³

David Richo, a psychotherapist, goes on to say,

Our shadow is hidden in our psyche, but we can recognize it and take responsibility for it...There is a way to recognize the shadow: What strongly attracts or repels us in others is a clue to where our own darkness lurks. As we begin accepting our shadow, we acknowledge our projections of our shadow qualities onto others as truths about ourselves.¹⁹⁴

“Our ‘Shadow’ is the collection of negatives or undesirable traits we keep hidden—the things we don’t like about ourselves or are afraid to admit: egotism...But it also includes our positive, untapped potential—qualities we may admire in others but disavow in ourselves. Befriending the Shadow makes fear an ally and enables us to live more authentically. It also automatically improves our interpersonal relationships,

¹⁹³ David Richo, *Shadow Dance: Liberating the Power of Creativity of Your Dark Side* (Boston, Massachusetts: Shambala Publications, Inc. 1999), 12-13.

¹⁹⁴ Richo, *Power of Creativity*, 13.

because we are freed from the need to project our own negativity on to others when theirs is projected on to us.”¹⁹⁵

The Hermeneutical Self Inventory, the Integral Spirituality Map and the Shadow work were all very instrumental in my development during the six-month demonstration project, helping me to see more clearly into the spiritual direction process.

¹⁹⁵ Richo, *Power of Creativity*, 324 and back cover.

CHAPTER 8

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION FOR THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

The spiritual director is required to pay close attention to her or his own self-care and spiritual life; stay abreast of new information and developments in spiritual direction, and be accountable to peers in the discipline and ministry.

Part of self-care is maintaining one's own spiritual practice. Attending retreats could be included as something other than prayer and reading the Holy Scriptures and sacred texts. Also of great importance is the spiritual director must obtain her own spiritual director with whom she attends regularly scheduled sessions.

According to Jeannette A. Bakke, spiritual director, an important question to ask oneself as a potential directee, whether a lay person or a spiritual director, might be or should be, "Is the Holy Spirit drawing me to this person for spiritual direction."¹⁹⁶ Bakke also says, "We may want to inquire about how spiritual directors nurture their spiritual life."¹⁹⁷ Bakke goes on to stress the importance of a spiritual director attending her or his own spiritual direction sessions, seeking supervision, and choosing individuals to fulfill

¹⁹⁶ Jeannette A. Bakke, *Holy Invitations: Exploring Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 107.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 107.

these rolls. “We may want to inquire about how spiritual directors arrange for their own accountability, how they provide for supervision.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 107.

Vocational and professional development might include attendance at spiritual direction conferences, symposiums and workshops. One can also stay abreast by reading newly published literature by persons in the field, which may include other spiritual directors, some of whom may also be professional clergy, scholars, theologians and mental health care practitioners.

Accountability can be met by attending two-hour supervisory sessions in a one-to-one relationship or a group process among peers. Stressing the importance of supervision, Diane Berke, Director of One Spirit Interfaith Seminary, advises, “Seek supervision and feedback from qualified professionals.”¹⁹⁹ Tilden Edwards, an Episcopal priest, gives an example of the peer group process:

The form of supervision chosen by a director needs to reflect one’s understanding of spiritual direction and sense of its practice...a monthly two-hour meeting...ideal group would consist of about six practicing spiritual directors from a variety of backgrounds, who themselves have spiritual directors...two members of the group present themselves in relation to a particular directee at each monthly meeting.²⁰⁰

Carolyn Lewis is the person that I chose as my spiritual director. She is a member of the Quaker tradition. I met her through Sr. Arlie Ketchum, director of the Elizabeth Seton Women’s Center in New York City, a site where I have conducted workshops, and a center that provides me a space to provide spiritual direction sessions.

Ms. Lewis and I made arrangements to meet for a getting-to-know-you session. After the first ten to fifteen minutes, I was immediately drawn to her—her gentle, peaceful, quite presence. After that first meeting, I felt that she was someone that I could

¹⁹⁹ Diane Berke, *Interfaith Minister’s Training and Reference Manual* (New York: One Spirit Interfaith Seminary, 2003), 154.

²⁰⁰ Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Director, Spiritual Companion: Guide to Tending the Soul* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2001), 211.

go six or more sessions with—someone that I could talk to, who would provide me a safe, listening environment. She was there for me the entire six months—always on time, with a strong, steady energy.

In the first session I was so relieved to have someone to talk to—someone to hear me and listen to me. I ventilated about the pressures of work and school, and I also talked about how and why I chose to become a spiritual director. The session was left at my disposal, to talk about whatever I needed and wanted to, and also to talk as long as I chose to within the fifty-minute time period. The three things I remember being said to me were: “How does all of this stress make you feel?; You made a connection and decision about what you wanted to do the first time you saw the demonstration of spiritual direction; I’m looking forward to working with you.” I was looking forward to working with her as well, and I told her so.

In the second session, I was asked how I had been getting along. I said that I was blessed in spite of the pressure and stress. I spewed regarding friends saying they do not know how I do it, and I really should reconsider pursuing a doctoral degree at this stage of my life—nearing retirement. I mentioned that I had done a presentation that added to the list of things that required preparation and delivery. I talked about how I had to inadvertently report someone who was an impediment to my progress, and another incident where a colleague had offended me. In my “report” I did not state the lack of professionalism on the part of the first individual, and I did not counter attack the person who offended me. I decided to handle these situations in ways that were not vengeful, causing reprimand to one, or hurt feelings to the other. In both instances, I got my point across—in the first my needs were met; in the second, the colleague knew to think twice

and keep a distance. I felt pretty good that I had not caused the first person any harm or the other person to feel attacked. That might not have been the case five to ten years prior.

The spiritual director mentioned that I seemed to be handling the pressure and stress effectively; that I demonstrated prayerfulness and awareness of God when I said that I was blessed; I discerned and used my voice to speak for myself but not hurt either person who had acted out of line or inappropriately. She also asked me how I felt about the sessions so far. My response was that she pointed out things to me that I am sometimes aware of, but do not always pay attention to, and I was not thinking of discernment when I was trying to find ways to take care of my needs and speak up for myself without hurting others who had offended me. I told her that she helped me to see that, and she did so very skillfully.

She asked me what it had been like doing sessions with directees. I told her that it was initially exhausting—I took a nap for three hours after I had done three sessions back to back. I had to pace the sessions better in order to take care of myself.

She asked me how I was drawn to interfaith ministry. I told her that it took me three quarters of my life before the thought even entered my mind—it was never a conscious plan of mine. When I knew, I kept questioning it, but continued to be drawn in to investigate and, finally, respond. She said, “You were pulled, but you knew. You kept showing up!”

She shared with me, “What I hear from you, you have a close relationship with God...there seems to be an ongoing wonder, awe and delight when you speak of God.” I

told her that it was amazing to hear her say that, but it is difficult if I feel angry or disappointed with God.

She asked me if it worries me when I feel angry or disappointed with God. I said I mentioned it because what she described seemed like an ideal relationship with God. She told me, “You are allowed to get angry and speak with your voice when you are angry...All sides of a relationship are real and alive. If we get stuck in the anger, we cannot grow. We have to include darkness with the light.” I told her that I had never heard of being angry with God—not in my Christian upbringing nor when I converted to Islam—until my first year in interfaith studies. At that time I found out that Jews argue with God. From the Christian perspective one is taught that God is not to be questioned. From the Islamic perspective, one is taught that everything is the will of Allah—plain, simple and as a matter of fact.

She asked me how I feel about God. My answer was that God is always present. When we invoke the presence of God, it is not because God is not already present. It is a way of acknowledging God and demonstrating respect—humbly asking the divine presence to be in the equation of the experience that we are involved in or about to undertake.

In the third session I was asked how I had done over the past month, and if anything had brought me joy. I shared that my Doctor of Ministry proposal had been approved—another milestone accomplished, and I had become an official doctoral candidate; sessions with the directees were going pretty well—challenging, sometimes a little daunting, but mostly satisfying, and that I had attended extra courses on integral spirituality and shadow work, which proved very fascinating and surprising. She

congratulated me on my proposal, and asked me what was daunting about doing spiritual direction, and what was surprising about shadow work.

My answers were: In spiritual direction training, we are advised to meditate or pray before a session, and to go forth with the intent to do no harm. It is not something that I worry about, but it is a concern sometimes; and I think the concern keeps me in check—something similar to what some seasoned professionals say before they are about to undertake a presentation, a sermon or a performance: Stage fright keeps them on their toes, keeps them grounded, and keeps the ego in check. Also, actual sessions are very different from the classroom practicum. It is similar to being a nursing student under the watchful eye of the instructor, then becoming first a graduate nurse and then a Registered Professional Nurse who pretty much functions on her own.

The shadow work was surprising because it brought up old, long-forgotten, deeply buried memories—some of which caused me to handle situations in the ways that I have. Yet, I have learned and I am still learning, choosing to behave differently—like the situations with the individuals who offended me.

She told me that that was transformation. When I responded that I had not thought of it in that way, she said, “Keep it in your heart, not your head.” That was an “ah ha” moment, and it was very healing.” She said, “Healing... is a very powerful word. You go right to the core.” I told her that one of my directees said the same thing to me. She said that I should embrace that.

The next three sessions continued in the presence of someone who heard me, listened to me, and who appeared to remain non judgmental. She shared her insights, asked questions and provided reflections in ways that helped me see concerns and issues

more clearly and in a different light. I could comfortably and freely talk about God and prayer in the presence of someone who did not think that those who speak such language are from the Dark Ages.

Ms. Lewis would often ask me how I felt about a situation or how something made me feel. It was an opportunity to really think about how I felt, what I was feeling or how I looked at a situation. One may feel something, but not necessarily think about *how* it makes an impact. The sessions sometimes took on a spiritual tone that was very profound and serious, but there were moments of laughter. Ms. Lewis found out that I like to giggle and love to laugh, and she seemed perfectly all right with that.

In our sixth and final session, Ms. Lewis shared with me that when in session with me, she always hears that I have a sense of a loving God who blesses me in using my gifts, experiencing my desires and expressing in a loving way. She said, “God, the Creator, has been with us. You have a gift of surprise, laughter and delight. You respond to questions in very deep and thoughtful ways. All of this is something you can use in sessions with your directees.” I told her that her questions helped me to see things in my mind as though they were on a ticker tape.

She asked me, “If you were to sum up our sessions, what would you say?”

I answered:, “First and foremost, I needed to talk, to be heard and listened to in a comfortable, non-judgmental and safe environment, without a lecture or a sermon—unlike talking to a mate or a member of the family who usually go into the fix-it, solution mode. You provided that for me. You asked questions and used reflection in a very skillful way that was very helpful—providing me the opportunity to stop, take a step back and look at myself, my thoughts, responses, actions and reactions as well as my inner

being. That is very refreshing. One of my directees told me it was like coming out of the shower. I would describe it as being able to exhale. Your tone and pacing were gentle, providing a peaceful atmosphere, conducive to deep thought and going within. There was a seamlessness and smoothness in our sessions; you are attentive and thorough. I think that you would make an excellent supervisor.”

Rev. Dr. Joyce Liechenstein, associate director of One Spirit Interfaith Seminary (OSIS), was the spiritual director-supervisor for this demonstration project. She is the person who initiated the spiritual direction program at OSIS, and she is the first person that I saw conducting a spiritual direction session demonstration. It was with a fellow seminarian. Aside from an assignment we had to do the month before, I had never heard of the practice. I thought the demonstration would be just that—a demonstration to show how it is done. I did not expect or know that it would be a real-life session. The person who sat in the directee’s chair discussed real issues and, at times, showed raw emotions and shed real tears. Some of the observers in the room were responding in like fashion—some reaching for tissues, and others sitting in quiet awe. At that time, I thought two things: I needed to sit in some sessions, and I wanted to learn how to do that. I said to Dr. Liechenstein at the end of the day: “I would like to be like you when I grow up!”

I wanted to sit in sessions because I had lost my mother just three months before graduation from seminary, and I was going through a difficult grieving period. At the time that I saw the demonstration, it occurred to me that I could include spiritual direction in my ministry—partially answering my question to myself: How will my ministry unfold? Four months after graduation, I was enrolled in the spiritual direction classes. I also began to attend sessions with Dr. Liechenstein. The process helped to relieve the

grief that I was experiencing. After six sessions, it was not fully resolved, but I was able to see it for what it was, and able to allow myself to grieve freely and walk through it without feeling as though it was a sign of weakness or a loss of control. It was better to identify the pain and sadness, feel it and release it rather than suppress it and not come to terms with it or have it show up in other ways at a later time. It was empowering and strengthening.

It was my experience with Dr. Liechenstein that made me decide to ask her to be my spiritual director-supervisor for the New York Theological Seminary's (NYTS) doctor of ministry project: Faith to Faith; Spiritual Direction with A Multifaith Context. We had three sessions, one every other month during the six-month demonstration period. The following is a synopsis of our sessions:

Confirmation when I carried out a requirement of spiritual direction, for example,

- Asking if a directee discussed physical symptoms with her physician.
- Questioning if a directee thinks she needs to seek see a mental health professional in the face of depression or symptoms of depression.
- Allowing a directee to speak at length, with minimal or no questioning and reflection if it appeared that that was what the individual needed to do—release, ventilate, be heard and listened to in the midst of a non-threatening, non-judgmental presence.

Some points to consider:

- If a directee asks, “Do you have any questions you want to ask me, or do you want to lead into something,” ask her, “Is there something you would like me to ask, or is there something in particular that you would like to talk about?”

- If a directee extends an invitation to a function, but does not bring it up again, it should not be mentioned. It may be all right to attend one event, but a social relationship with the directee should be discouraged while the person is attending sessions. If a friendship develops later on and the person wants to resume sessions, refer her to another director.
- Let the directee request prayer or meditation at the beginning or end of a session, or ask, “How would you like to begin or end the session?” You can offer to begin or end with deep breathing or a brief period of silence.
- If a directee outside of your faith tradition requests that you begin or end with a prayer in your faith, allow the individual to do so at each session. Withhold initiating your practices so as not to give license to anyone that you are imposing your tradition. This applies to all directors of any faith tradition or spiritual practice.
- Do your own deep breathing exercises and centering before each session as a form of clearance and relaxation between sessions.
- Let a directee know that you are present for her without taking on her pain or story. This advice was offered as a result of reporting fatigue and headache after initial sessions with directees. Sometimes such directors may be very sensitive and may be picking up and experiencing what the directee is experiencing—empathizing with her. Persons who demonstrate this sensitivity are called empathes, and should pay close attention to themselves and their reactions. Exhaustion, fatigue and headaches after a session may indicate that the directee's emotions, feelings, thoughts, withheld information or depression are being sensed

by the director. Poor self image and deprecating the self on the part of the directee, are other issues that the director may react to.

- Talk with God about the headache and other reactions: “Okay, God, what do I have to learn here? Did I cause the headache? Did the directee cause it? Am I taking care of myself, and maintaining my own spiritual practice? Was I ready to enter into the session? Is it possible the pounding headache may have occurred because you felt as though the directee was beating up on herself—“pounding” on herself?”
- Use judgment in self disclosure. Ask permission to share a personal story: “I experienced something. Would you like me to share it?”
- If a directee remains silent, allow her to do so and, at some point, ask: “What was happening to you in the silence?”
- Observe for and be aware of signs of transference and counter transference.
- Be sure to get enough sleep, rest, exercise, and good nutrition; maintain your own spiritual practice; center and ground yourself before entering a session.
- Remember that God is in charge.
- Trust God, yourself and the process.
- Don’t expect perfection.
- Learn from your mistakes.
- Remember that you are human. God is God!
- Don’t make a habit of going overtime in sessions.

Evaluation, based on written and verbal reports

- Detail - excellent

- Questions and reflections - excellent
- Reports, written and verbal - very good. Directees seem to be satisfied with the sessions. Written outline - very good.

Note: Outline based on nursing SOAP notes: **S**ubjective; **O**bjective; **A**ssessment and **P**lan.

We discussed the evaluation questionnaire that I drew up, and Dr. Liechenstein said that it is very good; she asked if I consulted a guide book. I did not. I used past work experience in nursing and health care where I had to develop forms and devise problem-solving instruments involving policy, procedure and staff development.

Dr. Liechenstein is as excellent a supervisor as she is a spiritual director.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION AND FORECAST

Based on the overall outcome of this demonstration project, Faith to Faith: Spiritual Direction with a Multifaith Context, it is clearly evident that a Muslim spiritual director demonstrated how she effectively provided the services of spiritual direction to Muslim and non Muslim directees. The results that the Muslim spiritual director received from the spiritual direction services of a non Muslim (Quaker) spiritual director and a non Muslim (Christian) spiritual director supervisor also demonstrated how spiritual direction in general can effectively cross lines of faith tradition for equally positive experiences. The project also casts a bright light on the evolution and hopeful future of the interfaith, multifaith, multicultural, multiracial, multiethnic country and world that we live in today.

The results of this project not only demonstrated that spiritual direction can be offered and sought across the borders of one faith to other faiths, but specifically across the borders of Islam to other faiths. This is very important, for several reasons: Islam is still fairly new to many Americans and Westerners; Islam is quite often misunderstood, and the religion, though based on a number of unfounded and preconceived ideas, is feared by many. The positive results and outcome of this project can help to erase some of the negative beliefs and ideas and allay fears, thereby removing hesitancy or reservation on the part of non Muslims to interact with Muslims in general, and to seek the services of a Muslim spiritual director in particular. The service of spiritual direction

is one area that can help to bring about change between people of different faith traditions and it can result in change for the individuals receiving the direction as well as the one who is providing it. This project demonstrates the changes that happened in spiritual direction sessions for directees of the Jewish, Christian, Islamic and Buddhist traditions, and for a Muslim spiritual director. Those changes would be considered transformations.

The Spiritual Exercises designed by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Spain included spiritual direction. The exercises and direction, especially on a month-long retreat, were meant to bring about formation—developing one’s relationship with God. The greater or ultimate goal was and is to experience transformation—a change in form, appearance, nature or character. This could be a major change in the way one relates to God or her spiritual life, or a change in how one perceives and reacts to those things that are happening in her life. One of the objectives and purposes of spiritual direction is to companion with the directee as she or he seeks either to connect, form, establish, develop or maintain a relationship with God and or a higher state of consciousness. If this connection, through spiritual direction sessions, helps the directee to perceive and react differently to life’s circumstances, some form of transformation has taken place.

From my perspective, each directee experienced transformation—some greater than others. This is based on , not only what was witnessed, but on what directees stated—such as, “I had an internal shift,” or “I had a turn around.” Some of what the directees stated in their evaluations and statements about the benefits of the sessions also demonstrated some shifts and changes they made. Another very significant transformation that took place, as a result of conducting the spiritual direction sessions, was that of my own. Those of the directees will be mentioned first. For further details of

their sessions, see Cases #1 through #7 in Appendix B. Their transformations are discussed in this chapter.

DIRECTEE TRANSFORMATION

Abigail, Case #1, spoke of a number of things that concerned her, but the two that were most significant and outstanding through the six sessions were her strenuous efforts to change what was happening on her job, and to make a love relationship happen.

She talked quite a bit about her job as a lawyer—a profession she thinks she’s very good at, but one she also dislikes. She studied law to please her father. I did quite a bit of listening because I sensed that she really needed to talk about what she was experiencing, and she also needed to be heard and listened to. I asked a few questions and would, occasionally, reflect to her what she was saying. Abigail’s other concern was that of establishing a relationship with a man—“A love relationship,” as she put it. She went to Washington State to see one man, who did not respond to her as she had hoped; and she had a five-day visit to California with someone she knew from years prior who had become a pen pal. She returned to New York City with the intention of moving to the west coast to be with the gentlemen as soon as she graduated seminary in June. By the very next session she informed me that “He broke up with me over the telephone.” I mentioned that long-distance relationships can sometimes pose challenges.

Abigail and I talked briefly about our faith traditions and scriptures at various times in different sessions. By the last session, Abigail said that she had sought Torah and prayer and, as she put it, “I had an internal shift. I’m not upset anymore!” She said she’d deal with the job while weighing her options, and she’d wait for a love relationship to happen. The internal shift that she experienced was a realization not to force things to

happen. That internal shift was change—transformation. She seemed much calmer. She also informed me that the sessions were very helpful to her. Hearing that was tremendously rewarding and satisfying.

Alisha, Case #2, was challenged by her attempt to improve her work and Buddhist practice. She said that “in Zen, work and practice are one—there is no difference.” She mentioned that she had given up those things that give her personal pleasure. When exhaustion forced her to seek rest, relaxation and pleasure, she expressed that she felt guilty. Alisha also talked quite a bit about her conflict, expressing that she had “no one at the center to talk to about these things.” That statement indicated that she needed to ventilate and express what she was experiencing and feeling, in spite of her “ego getting in the way” and causing her to complain—a behavior that is not looked upon favorably in the practice of her Zen tradition.

Alisha also discussed two significant events that took place at the center: Her friend and former director of the center committed suicide after working there for fifteen years without ever taking a vacation. The other was that the head monk would take his vacation in spite of short staffing and a heavy workload at the center—the two events presenting an interesting contrast as well as clear signs, which I pointed out to her. Coupled with the opportunity to talk about her conflicts in sessions and an opportunity to take a five-day silent retreat, she realized that her deceased friend has no life; the head monk was taking care of himself, and she was in the beginning states of giving up her life to the center. She said, “It’s amazing to face your situation and say, ‘I’m going to deal with it differently!’” I mentioned the inner jihad, finding it safe and appropriate to say it to her because she had studied Islam. She compared it with material she was reading

about the inner war.. She also had a transformative experience, and I detected a greater sense of peace from her.

Cabretta, Case #3, spoke mostly of issues that arose from very low self esteem and deep feelings of not being good enough. To her, everyone else was more educated, more intelligent and articulate, and had bigger plans than hers because they knew what they wanted to do with their ministries. Her assumptions and imaginings about others and what they thought of her, compiled with her own feelings of low self worth, were paralyzing her with fear to talk with members of her study group—in essence, her fears were robbing of her of experiencing life as she wanted it to be. By our last session together, Cabretta shared that she “had a turn around.”

She was so excited, she said it twice. She had a teleconference with the members of her study group, and she participated instead of remaining silent. She said, “People respect you when you respect yourself!” She seemed so relieved and sounded so much happier.

Cabretta had also stopped adhering to her Presbyterian faith for more than three decades, practicing yoga and meditation instead. Although she still accepted Christ as the God within, she had trouble saying “God.” She said, “Now, I can talk about God because God is our common denominator.” Her transformation was multifold: She was able to take the focus off of herself long enough to allow herself to open up to her group members; she didn’t return to her Presbyterian church, but she began attending Unity services, and she replaced God in her vocabulary **and** by saying, “God is our common denominator,” she also accepted God back into her life. One very interesting statement that Cabretta said to me was, “You leave it up to the person to solve the problems.

Doritha, Case #4, said, “The sessions have helped me. Whatever I talked about were issues in my mind. The sessions helped me to put the issues in perspective, even if not fully resolving them. The issues became more manageable to me. It’s (*spiritual direction*) guiding a person to bring her forth to her own truth. When we get ourselves out of the way, the Creator molds us as we are to be.”

Doritha not only reached some understanding of her issues, she demonstrated an understanding of *how* spiritual direction helped her to arrive at those conclusions. It was a transformation because she had reached some understanding of things that happened to her and were happening to her—a place that she had not been before. She also reflected or mirrored back to me that I had followed guidelines and applied them, “guiding a person,” thereby fulfilling my role as companion and walking with her to this point in her journey. That was very fulfilling.

Emma, Case #5, completed only five sessions. In the first two sessions, she talked mostly about her schedule and all of the things she does revolving around her children, church, seminary studies, home life, work, and trying to find time for her personal life—trying to juggle it all. I sensed that there was something was going on with her that she was not talking about. It was in the fourth, next to the last session, that the flood gates opened up and she informed me that her husband finally moved out. She had never even mentioned him before that time. It was at that point that I felt she trusted me enough to share that piece of information with me, and it also demonstrated to me that my instincts had been on to something.

The transformation that took place evolved around the issue of trust—she had to develop enough trust in me to discuss those concerns that tested her spiritual strength, and I had to trust my instincts and judgment.

Lawissa, Case #6, had been struggling with extreme fatigue; unemployment that resulted, in part, from her lack of energy; how she could find work that would be more suitable to her condition, and how she could find ways to generate an income from her gift and talent as an artist.

Initially, it was very challenging to have telephone conversations with Lawissa because she spoke in a breathless whisper, and there were long, pregnant pauses. The sound of silence required patience—characteristics and qualities I consciously work on in all areas of my life, even with myself. Spiritual direction, in this case, presented me the opportunity to apply what I’ve learned from it, and also what I taught myself.

Where Lawissa expressed that she was unable to see her progress as a result of four sessions, she was able to answer the question I posed to her: “Do you see any changes from the time we began sessions up to this time?” With some thought, she verbalized the changes that took place since we began talking. (See Appendix B ,Case #6). She also mentioned her ongoing trust in God. Quite often, the individual who is in the midst of change does not realize the gradual differences the way an observer does. Not noticing does not mean that change or transformation did not take place.

Roberta, Case #7, was pleased to be informed that, in spite of not attending church, her prayers and saying grace before her meals were indeed rituals and spiritual practices that connected her to God. She indicated that, since the sessions began, she was showing a greater interest in things religious and spiritual; that she now strives to be more

Christ like, i.e. kind, loving, sharing, respectful of self and others, and less judgmental.

She said the sessions helped her to get the issues “out of my head, and that makes it seem not so bad.” Then, she said, “In some ways, it’s very enlightening and transforming.”

Roberta’s statement of realization that included “enlightening and transforming” is a demonstration and evidence of transformation in and of itself because she is the one who recognized and stated it. I had not thought about, hoped for or expected such feedback, but I was grateful for it.

MY OWN TRANSFORMATION

In addition to the transformation that I witnessed of the directees and those which they themselves expressed, I also experienced my own. First of all, I learned from my volunteer subjects. By witnessing how they faced the challenges of their circumstances, they provided me the opportunity to question and reflect to them in ways that could be helpful to them—thereby helping me to become a better spiritual director. I found, simultaneously, that some of the questions I posed to them were also helpful to me. For instance, “What is God showing you around the issue of...? What does God expect of you in this particular area? Where is God in this equation? In the case of a non-theistic individual, I might ask, “What is life demonstrating to you?”

I faced a number of challenges in my efforts to complete the doctor of ministry program—from the very beginning. It seemed to take forever to get the application package. That was frustrating. When I finally received it, I was asked to rush its completion. I did everything that was required as quickly as possible to complete the process. I went through three interviews before it was certain that I would be accepted.

The second interview was very challenging—leaving me to wonder. By the third interview, I was informed that I was accepted.

I awaited information for the next steps. When nothing came through after a reasonable length of time, I inquired, only to be informed that all information had been sent to me via e-mail. I never received it because the seminary had my e-mail address listed incorrectly. The material was given to me when classes began. Consequently, I was not prepared. The professor did not respond kindly to my unpreparedness—a situation that had been out of my control. I decided not to fight—just to get on with it and do my best to focus on my studies, and keep my eye on the prize.

All course work was completed—including the challenging Hermeneutics class. In spite of what Jerry Reisig, the director of library science says about pack-rat readers, I got caught up in the interesting reading, which can be problematic when reading volume became massive, and brevity in written assignments are required. In addition, I had to learn to do the papers on the Blackboard computer system—classes and home work in cyber space were all very new and initially challenging for me.

There were setbacks in the proposal process, and transfer to my advisor had to take place earlier than planned. The process progressed smoothly thereafter, and the proposal was approved. Other than the strict requirements that had to be met for the site project in spiritual direction at One Spirit Interfaith Seminary, almost everything was uneventful. Two subjects withdrew from the program, and a few scheduling incidents occurred. In spite of these minor problems, the demonstration project was completed in the time slot planned—June, 2009, with follow-up reminders calling, and e-mailing to collect all related paper work in the following month of July.

Ramadan came in the month of August, and it was the most difficult fast I can ever remember experiencing in over forty years. Thinking that a brief vacation would help, I took a trip after Ramadan was over in mid September, and suffered terrible jet lag for about ten days after returning home.

Finally, I was able to hand in some drafted chapters. It was a month before I heard anything, and major revisions were required. Then, my advisor got involved in administrative overload, and I received less feedback. Finally, I was switched to another advisor, which required adjustments on the part of both parties. In the meantime, I was receiving assistance from my spouse with computer applications.

I had done and paid for spiritual direction **and** supervision because it was required for the six-month demonstration project. I could easily have attended another six months, but that would require additional money that needed to be spent in other areas of the D. Min. process. Standing on the edge, I talked with a friend and heard myself saying, “I have to walk through this to find out what it is all about: “What is God showing me around these issues of delay and chaos?” My answer, thus my own transformation was that God wants me to

- ❖ Have patience with myself, others who are involved in the process itself, and in the order of the Divine Plan.
- ❖ Trust myself, my instincts, the process and the Divine Plan.
- ❖ Listen—not just hear, LISTEN!
- ❖ Overcome the obstacles—find a way around, over and under them.
- ❖ Adjust to change—it’s constant.
- ❖ Adjust to change—be focused, but not fixed.
- ❖ Be flexible!

- ❖ Find ways to deal with overload—ask for help, especially from Divine Source.
- ❖ Find ways to deal with the feelings of being overwhelmed—breathe, take some quiet time, go for a walk.
- ❖ Express gratitude, especially to Divine Power.”
- ❖ Take responsibility for your part in the chaos, but don’t beat yourself up.
- ❖ Be kind to yourself.
- ❖ Keep going—don’t give up, don’t give out and don’t give in.
- ❖ Remember that you’ve made it this far by your belief, your faith and Divine Grace, Mercy and Will.
- ❖ Keep trying! God will give you the strength!
- ❖ God is in charge!

I could hear my late mother’s famous words: “Nothing beats a failure, but a try!”

I did not understand that growing up, but I do now. She would also often say, “Thank God for small blessings, and bigger blessings will come.” Remembering her words give me strength to stay the course and keep going—to deal with changes and challenges of the unexpected that continue to and, ultimately, transform me, into a renewed and stronger person.

When the idea of spiritual direction arose as a topic for the demonstration project, it was initially thought of as one in which presentations would be made to groups of different faiths—to find out what they knew about the service, to see how they would respond to the idea of interfaith and multifaith spiritual direction, and to find out how they would react to a Muslim spiritual director. It was suggested that I consider the case study route—either to be a spiritual director to someone of a different faith than my own—a non Muslim, or have someone of a different faith be my spiritual director. Since that would only include two faiths, the decision was to include directees from the three

Abrahamic religions and Buddhism. Even though a case study was not conducted specifically on myself, it turns out that I, in a way, became my own case study, and I experienced change and transformation in the process of conducting sessions.

My own ongoing challenges and transformations helped me to be there for the volunteer subjects (directees) who entrusted themselves to the project, the process and my companionship and guidance. None of us knew what would unfold. In a number of ways, we all took a leap of faith. Thankfully, the overall results were rewarding and satisfying. In a number of ways, we were all transformed.

The positive outcome here can encourage other Muslims to consider the discipline, ministry, practice and service of spiritual direction for fellow Muslims as well as for non Muslims. Ultimately, it may encourage more Muslim women to become spiritual directors and even interfaith ministers.

The six months of spiritual direction sessions revealed the common threads between people of different faith traditions. Namely, concerns and issues involving relationships on all levels—God, self, parents, siblings, mates, offspring, extended family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, clergy and people in general; the work environment, studies, health, finances, loneliness and challenges concerning religion and spiritual practice.

In addition, a project of this nature and scope reveals the common and uncommon threads of the faith traditions that were explored. For instance, Judaism, Christianity and Islam all fall under the common Abrahamic umbrella. All three traditions are monotheistic—Judaism and Islam believe solely and strictly in One God without interceders, and Christians believe in the Triune God or Trinity—the Father, the Son and

the Holy Ghost. Christians must go through the Son to reach the Father. Buddhists, on the other hand, do not believe in a deity and are, therefore, considered non theistic. All four traditions have a founder, messenger or prophet; all four have Holy Scriptures and Sacred Texts, paths of attainment, goals and spiritual practices and rituals.

Other spiritual directors may wish to duplicate this project using different models, for example, using the same faith traditions that were used here but with different configurations: a Jewish spiritual director with Christian, Muslim and Buddhist directees. Otherwise, different combinations of faith traditions may be explored—Confucianism, Shintoism, Taoism; Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism; African and Native American Traditionalists, Polytheists and Wiccans: Baha’i, Spiritual Baptists and Zoroastrians. There are a number of possibilities to consider.

Interfaith, multifaith, and interspiritual spiritual direction lends itself not only to the offering of a service that assists all seekers on their spiritual journeys, but also provides the opportunity for the spiritual director and directees to interact with people of different faith traditions, helping to dismantle the walls that we have built between ourselves. The ministry of spiritual direction in a multifaith context provides the opportunity for the spiritual director to discover the beliefs and practices of other faith traditions and people whose lives are governed by belief systems different from her own. It provides opportunity for exposure and acceptance of our differences and similarities, and helps to build respect, understanding and peace between all people.

Questions arose early on in the project, and also near its end: “What makes you, an interfaith Muslim woman spiritual director, unique? What do you bring to its ministry and the process?” The answer is multifold. I am an American Muslim woman, born and

reared in the United States. I live in a multifaith nation. I am not the typical Muslim woman who may have lived and was reared in a strict Islamic society. Even if a Muslim woman were to take on the role of spiritual director, that role may be restricted to the Islamic community, and maybe even to women only—even here in America. My early exposure to other Christian denominations outside of my home environment and exposure to other traditions, coupled with my genuine and sincere interest in other faiths, make me a very good candidate for the role of interfaith and multifaith spiritual director who can provide the service effectively. In addition, my sincere desire to learn, know and grow in knowledge of other faiths for the purpose of moving beyond tolerance, and building respect, understanding and peace between people of different faiths, substantiate my efforts and intention. As mentioned previously, one does not have to be typical to be faithful.

My own plans are to make spiritual direction a focal point of my ministry; to work in collaboration with those who have invited me to function in the role of spiritual director in their centers, institutes and organizations, from which various services are offered and provided to the general, spiritual, and multifaith community. This includes community outreach, health and healing; continued involvement in life cycle events and speaking engagements, and participation in interfaith and multifaith events. I will also update all of my pertinent information for the Spiritual Directors International directory.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

Involving Human Subjects
New York Theological Seminary's
Doctorate Degree in Multi-faith Ministry

Title: Faith to Faith: Spiritual Direction in a Multi-faith Context

Investigator:

*Ruqaiyah Nabe, RN, MS, Interfaith Minister
2 Horizon Road- Suite 1020, Fort Lee, NJ 07024*

Description:

You will be a subject in a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) project about the process and outcome of interfaith (interspiritual, multifaith) Spiritual Direction. The Spiritual Director, who is Muslim, will conduct Spiritual Direction sessions with Directees who are Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Buddhist. The project will take six (6) months to complete, and will make an important contribution to interfaith (interspiritual, multifaith) Spiritual Direction.

Risks and Benefits:

You will be involved in a series of six (6) monthly Spiritual Direction sessions which, will include discussions about your faith tradition, your spiritual beliefs, your spiritual practices and how they impact on your life in general, as well as how your life in general impacts on your overall spirituality. The results of the project will be available to you and should provide you with additional information that will enhance your knowledge of Spiritual Direction.

Time Commitment:

The once-per-month Spiritual Direction sessions over a six-month period, will consist of a fifty-minute contact hour. Additional time will include the completion of an evaluation questionnaire that will require written responses that are to be returned to the investigator of the project.

Confidentiality:

You name will not be included on any documents. We do not believe that you can be identified by any information used. This informed consent will not be kept with any of the other documents completed with this project. All information that you provide will be treated with the strictest confidentiality, dignity, privacy and respect.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate at any time.

Statement of Consent:

By signing this consent form, you agree to participate in the project entitled: Faith to Faith: Spiritual Direction in a Multi-faith Context.

Print Name

Signature

Date

APPENDIX B

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Investigator: Ruqaiyah Nabe

Please take a moment to review the entire questionnaire before you begin to fill in your answers. It is important that you respond to all of the questions for a complete compilation of data.

Please complete the Directee (Counselee) profile. Then, respond to the questions in the Spiritual Direction (Counseling) Sessions section (following the profile) by checking Yes, No or N/A (non-applicable), and by recording in the comment section to support your choice of answer. If you have additional comments, please write on the back of the page (including the number of the question that you are referring to.) Thank you very much for participating in the interfaith (interspiritual/multifaith) spiritual direction project.

Directee (Counselee) Profile

Male_____ Female_____

Race/Ethnicity:

Negroid/African Descent _____

Mongoloid/Asian Descent _____

Caucasoid/European Descent _____

Native American _____

Hispanic/Latino _____

Middle Eastern _____

Pacific Islander _____

Other (Please Explain) _____

Age:

18 to 25 years old	_____
26 to 35 years old	_____
36 to 45 years old	_____
46 to 55 years old	_____
56 to 65 years old	_____
66 to 75 years old	_____
Above 75 years old	_____

Education:

High School Graduate	_____
College/University Undergraduate	Please explain_____
Graduate or Advanced Degree	Please explain_____
Certification or Licensure	Please explain_____
Seminary Certificate or Degree	Please explain_____

Current Occupation/Profession/Trade/Vocation:

Marital Status:

Single	_____	Divorced	_____
Married	_____	Separated	_____
Widowed	_____	Other	Please explain_____

Offspring (Please check and complete all that applies):

Infant to 5 y/o _____ No. of males _____ No. of females _____
Ages _____ Ages _____

6 to 12 y/o _____ No. of males _____ No. of females _____
Ages _____ Ages _____

13-18 y/o _____ No. of males _____ No. of females _____
Ages _____ Ages _____

19-22 y/o _____ No. of males _____ No. of females _____
Ages _____ Ages _____

Above 22 y/o _____ Males _____ Females _____
Ages _____ Ages _____

Do adult offspring live at home with you? Yes _____ No _____

Do you have grandchildren? Yes _____ No _____

Do any of your grandchildren live with you? Yes _____ No _____

Do elderly parents or relatives live with you? Yes _____ No _____

I have no offspring _____

Total number of people in the household _____

Additional comments: _____

Faith Tradition or Spiritual Practice:

What is your current faith tradition or spiritual practice? _____

Denomination or Sect _____

Is this the faith tradition or spiritual practice that you were born into or
grew up in? Yes _____ No _____

If no, what was your previous faith tradition or spiritual practice?

**If applicable, how long have you been a convert to your current faith?
tradition or spiritual practice?_____**

Are you a member of a house of worship or spiritual community?

Yes_____ No_____

If yes, please check accordingly:

Synagogue _____ Church_____ Mosque_____ Temple_____ Center_____

Other_____ Please explain_____

If yes, what are your reasons for membership? _____

**Do you seek or have you ever sought counsel with your
religious/spiritual leader? Yes_____ No_____**

If no, why not? _____

If you are not part of a membership, why not?

Are you regularly involved in daily spiritual practice?

Yes_____ No_____

If yes, please check all that applies:

Prayer_____ Meditation_____ Affirmations_____ Imagery_____

Visualization_____

Reading: Scriptures and Sacred Texts_____ Please explain_____

Spiritual Direction (Counseling) Sessions

	Yes	No	N/A	Comment
1. Was your Spiritual Director:-				
A. Available				
B. Attentive				
C. Fully Present				
D. Compassionate				
E. Non-Judgmental				
2. Did your Spiritual Director provide you a sense of:-				
A. Comfort				
B. Confidentiality				
C. Privacy				
D. Safety				
E. Being heard				
F. Being listened to				
G. Drawing your own conclusions				
H. Finding your own solutions				

Additional comments: _____

	Yes	No	N/A	Comment

3.	Did your Spiritual Director:-				
A.	Reflect upon your expressed concerns, which provided you an opportunity to examine them more closely? and				
B.	Look for further clarity?				
C.	Ask you questions to help you think about what you were saying, providing you the opportunity to find your own answers?				
D.	Present examples, scenarios and stories similar to your own to help you view them, subjectively and objectively?				
E.	Mention, offer or recommend books, films or spiritual teachers and subject matter that could be helpful to you?				
F.	Participate in discussion with you concerning the principles of your faith tradition or spiritual beliefs and practices (e.g., prayer, sacred texts, meditation)?				
G.	Allow you to express your religious and spiritual beliefs without imposing his/her own?				
H.	Offer or recommend exercises that could be helpful to you (e.g. rest, relaxation, going to your house of worship, sitting quietly, changing your language with yourself)?				
I.	Inform you that, if necessary, you could seek the services of a mental health practitioner while attending Spiritual Direction				

sessions?				
J. Provide you the opportunity to ask questions?				
K. Respond to your questions?				
L. Have a sense of humor?				

	Yes	No	N/A	Comment
4. Did your Spiritual Direction sessions:-				
A. Help you to examine your spiritual life more closely?				
B. Help you to examine your life (in general) more closely?				
C. Help you to examine your faith tradition/spiritual practices and beliefs more closely?				
D. Deepen your beliefs in your faith tradition or spiritual practices?				
E. Help you to establish a faith tradition or spiritual practice?				
F. Result in your adding any rituals to your current spiritual practices?				
G. Help discover areas of your faith tradition/spiritual practice to explore deeper, further more fully?				
H.				
I.				
J.				
K.				
L.				

5. Following six months of once-per-month Spiritual Direction sessions:

A. What was most helpful to you?

B. What was least helpful to you?

C. What would you have liked more of?

D. What would you have like less of?

[illegible]

	Yes	No	N/A	Comment
6. Had you ever heard of Spiritual Direction (Companionship, Counseling, Guidance) before beginning the six-month project?				
7. Did your Spiritual Director give you an explanation of the Spiritual Direction process?				
8. Did you have any expectations of the Spiritual Direction process based on any prior knowledge or on the explanation given you?				
9A. Did you know what you wanted to talk about or discuss before you began your first session? Or				
B. Subsequent sessions?				
10A. Did you set any goals regarding your concerns and issues, either on your own or				

	with your Spiritual Director?				
B.	Did you address your concerns and issues?				
C.	Were any of your goals met?				
11A.	Following your six monthly sessions, were there any positive changes or resolutions regarding your concerns or issues?				
B.	After a six-month “trial” of Spiritual Direction sessions once per month, would you continue attending sessions?				
C.	Would you say that Spiritual Direction has been helpful to you?				
12.	Would you say that Spiritual Direction has been helpful to you?				
13A.	Was the Spiritual Director’s faith tradition different from yours?				
B.	If applicable, did it matter that the Spiritual Director’s faith tradition is different from yours?				
C.	Did it matter that the Spiritual Director is a Muslim (practices the Islamic faith)?				
D.	Would you see another Muslim Spiritual Director?				
E.	If available, would you seek the services of <i>this</i> Spiritual Director?				
F.	Would you recommend the services of <i>this</i> Spiritual Director?				

Additional comments: _____

	Yes	No	N/A	Comment
14. Would you consider seeing a Spiritual Director who is:-				
A. African traditionalist				
B. Agnostic				
C. Atheist				
D. Baha'i				
E. Buddhist				
Christian:-				
F. Catholic				
G. Protestant				
H. Spiritual Baptist				
I. Other Christian denomination				
J. Confucian				
K. Hindu				
L. Jain				
M. Jewish				
N. Muslim (mentioned earlier)				
O. Native American Traditionalist				
P. Polytheist				
Q. Sikh				
R. Taoist				
S. Unitarian Universalist				
T. Wiccan				
U. Zoroastrian				
V. Other (Please define)				

If there is anything that you would add to this questionnaire, please do so.

Additional comments: _____

Thank you! Thank you!! Thank you!!!

Ruqaiyah Nabe

APPENDIX C

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS FROM THE PROFILE SECTION OF THE EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Case #6

“...if you are turning this questionnaire into statistics, I know it will be a requirement, but I hope you understand that such ways of thinking are training you in separation from God, although it is important to fulfill requirements...please, please pray that you will be divested of this “scientific” thinking (true science is another matter and can bring you closer to God, but this cannot)...pray to fall into knowing which arises of itself. This is not heart knowing or God knowing...Become your own authority. Look deeply within yourself for answers. So much of our culture operates from “explanation” or “critical thinking”—it is a sterile, fruitless way of being. I pray that you will be filled with God’s love, and these bad habits people have been teaching you in school will drop away. May you stand in the presence of the Lord and be free.”

Case #7

“The spiritual counseling sessions forced me to see and acknowledge my spiritual practices, such as they are. I didn’t realize how much a part of me my customs were. To me, they were just habits of a lifetime, habits that comforted me and grounded me, and I didn’t even realize.”

Three directees are Caucasian, two are African Americans and one is Middle Eastern.

The women fell into three age categories: one in the 36 to 45 years of age; three in the 46 to 55 years of age, and three in the 56 to 65 years of age.

One is single; two are married; one is separated, and three are divorced.

One has no offspring; one has five offspring and three grandchildren; two have one offspring; two have three offspring, and one has two offspring.

One is a high school graduate with two years of college; two have bachelor degrees; three have master degrees, and one has a law degree.

Their occupations, professions, trades and vocations range from: self employed; school teacher; Dharma teacher/membership director, Zen center; Licensed Practical Nurse and artist; Registered Professional Nurses and Lawyer.

The women also have very diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds: Protestant Christian to Buddhist; Orthodox Judaism; Presbyterian to Hinduism and Unity; Christianity to Islam; Catholic to Quaker and Unity; Consciousness Spirituality and Holiness Protestant (Apostolic) Christian.

RESULTS FROM THE EVALUATION FORM

Data Results from the Evaluation Questionnaire

The data below arises from the seven directees' responses to the section of the questionnaire that pertained specifically to the spiritual direction sessions and the spiritual director. They were instructed to check yes, no or non-applicable (N/A) and to make a comment in the comment space and the additional comment section:

1.	Was your spiritual director:-	Yes %	No %	N/A	Comments
	A - Available?	100			
	B – Attentive?	100			
	C – Fully Present?	100			
	D – Compassionate?	100			
	E – Non-judgmental	100			

2.	Did your spiritual director provide you a sense of:-	Yes %	No %	N/A %	Comments
	A – Comfort?	86	14		
	B – Confidentiality?	100			
	C – Privacy?	100			
	D – Safety?	100			
	E – Being heard?	86	14		
	F – Being listened to?	100			
	G – Drawing your own conclusions?	86	14		

	H – Finding your own solutions?	86	14		
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3.	Did your spiritual director	Yes %	No %	N/A %	Comments
	A – Reflect upon your expressed concerns, which provided you an opportunity to examine them more closely, and to	100			
	B – Look for further clarity?	100			
	C – Ask questions to help you think about what you were saying, providing you the opportunity to find your own answers?	86		14	
	D – Present examples, scenarios and stories similar to your own to help you view them subjectively and objectively?	100			
	E – Mention, offer or recommend books, films or spiritual teachers and subject matter that could be helpful to you?	55	28	14	
	F – Participate with you concerning the principles of your faith tradition or spiritual beliefs and practices (e.g., prayer, sacred texts, meditation)?	100			
	G – Allow you to express your religious beliefs without imposing her own?	100			
	H – Offer or recommend exercises that could be helpful to you (e.g., rest, relaxation, going to your house of worship, sitting quietly, changing your language with yourself)?	100			
	I – Inform you that, if necessary, you could seek the services of a mental health professional while attending spiritual direction sessions?	58	28	14	
	J – Provide you the opportunity to ask questions?	100			
	K – Respond to your questions?	100			
	L – Have a sense of humor?	100			

4.	Did your spiritual director	Yes %	No %	N/A %	Comments
	A – Help you to examine your spiritual life more closely?	86		14	
	B – Help you to examine your life (in general) more closely?	100			
	C – Help you to examine your faith tradition/spiritual practices and beliefs more closely?	100			
	D – Help you to deepen your beliefs in your faith tradition or spiritual practices?	100			
	E – Help you to establish a faith tradition or spiritual practice	42	29	29	
	F – Help you to add any rituals to your current spiritual practices?	42	29	29	
	G – Help you to discover areas of your faith tradition/ spiritual practice to explore deeper, further, more fully?	58	42	14	

Note: - Questions 5, A – D are addressed under “Directee Comments to Specific Questions.”

6		Yes %	No %	N/A %	Comments
	Had you ever heard of spiritual direction (companionship, counseling, guidance) before beginning the six-month project?	58	42		

7		Yes %	No %	N/A %	Comments
	Did your spiritual director give you an explanation of the spiritual direction process?	100			

8		Yes %	No %	N/A %	Comments
	Did you have any expectations of the spiritual direction process based on any prior knowledge or on the explanation given you?	14	86		

9.		Yes %	No %	N/A %	Comments
	A – Did you know what you wanted to talk about before you began your first session or	14	86		
	B – Subsequent sessions?	58	42		

10.		Yes %	No %	N/A %	Comments
	A – Did you set any goals regarding your concerns and issues, either on your own or with your spiritual director?	28	72		
	B – Did you address your concerns and issues?	86		14	
	C – Were any of your goals met	86		14	

11.	Following your six monthly sessions	Yes %	No %	N/A %	Comments
	A – Were there any positive changes or resolutions regarding your concerns or issues?	100			
	B – After a six-month “trial” of spiritual direction sessions once per month, would you continue attending sessions?	14	43	14	29% no answer
	C – Would you attend sessions again if needed?	100			

12.		Yes %	No %	N/A %	Comments
	Would you say that spiritual direction has been helpful to you?	100			

13.		Yes %	No %	N/A %	Comments
	A – Is the spiritual director’s faith tradition different from yours?	86	14		
	B – If applicable, did it matter that the spiritual director’s faith tradition is different from yours?	14	72	14	
	C – Did it matter that the spiritual director is a Muslim (practices the Islamic faith)?		86	14	
	D – Would you see another Muslim spiritual director?	86	14		
	E – If available, would you seek the services of <i>this</i> spiritual director?	100			
	F – Would you recommend the services of <i>this</i> spiritual director?				

14.	Would you consider the services of a spiritual director who is	Yes %	No %	N/A %	Comments
	A – African Traditionalist	71	29		
	B – Agnostic	42	58		
	C – Atheist	29	71		
	D – Baha’i	71	29		
	E – Buddhist	100			
	F – Catholic (Christian)	72	14		14% no answer
	G – Protestant (Christian)	72	14		
	H – Spiritual Baptist	58	14		28% no answer
	I – Other Christian Denomination	58	42		

	J – Confucian	72	28		
	K – Hindu	58	42		
	L – Jain	58	42		
	M – Jewish	58	28		14% no answer
	N – Muslim (mentioned previously)	72	28		
	O – Native American Traditionalist	72	28		
	P – Polytheist	58	42		
	Q – Sikh	58	42		
	R – Taoist	86	14		
	S – Unitarian Universalist	86	14		
	T – Wiccan	42	58		
	U – Zoroastrian	42	58		
	V – Other (Please define)?				

Question 1, A – E

One hundred percent of the directees indicate that the spiritual director was available, attentive, fully present, compassionate and non-judgmental. These are requirements that set the tone of the spiritual direction session and the relationship between director and directee.

Question 2, A – H

Fourteen percent of the directees did not think that a sense of comfort was needed, nor felt a sense of being heard. There was a sense that the spiritual director may have been relating to the subject, a Buddhist, from a Judeo-Christian perspective. Perhaps the word is more appropriately *Abrahamic* since the spiritual director is a Muslim. However, the directee expressed that it was she who was operating from the Judeo-Christian framework. As a convert from Protestant to Buddhism she had replaced the word *God* with the word *karma*. Instead of God rewarding her for good, and punishing her for bad, she exchanged the word karma for the system of reward and punishment—if she does good, she will experience good karma or payment for her deeds; if she does bad, she will experience bad karma or payment for her deeds.

Otherwise, 86% of the directees felt that they were provided a sense of comfort, confidentiality, privacy safety, being heard and listened to, all of which are factors that help a directee to relax, open up and build trust in the spiritual direction process.

All felt that they were left to draw their own conclusions and find their own solutions, which is important so that there is no sense of being coerced in their decision making.

Question 3, A – L

One hundred percent of the directees report that the spiritual director used reflection and mirroring, thereby allowing them to examine their concerns and look more closely at them for further clarity—techniques which help a directee to look at her thoughts and feelings around certain issues, how she perceives and responds to them, and how she might change those perceptions and responses, if necessary.

Fourteen percent responded that the spiritual director didn't ask questions that provided an opportunity to find her own answer. In this particular case, the spiritual director did observe an obvious change from the way in which the participant was living her life as one of complete devotion to her work and spiritual practice, without personal pursuit and enjoyment, to a life that included a balance between work, spiritual practice, relationships and personal pursuits. She was questioned whether or not she thought she deserved a spiritually balanced life that included personal happiness.

One hundred percent said that they were presented with stories and scenarios similar to their own to help them view their lives subjectively and objectively; were free to discuss their faith traditions without the spiritual director imposing her own; were offered recommendations for relaxation, and exchanging language with self; they indicate that they were provided the opportunity to ask questions, and had their questions responded to. All subjects report that the spiritual director had a sense of humor. Humor and laughter produces relaxation, and relaxation helps the person to open up.

Fifty-eight percent of the volunteers report that books or films that could be helpful to them were recommended, and that they were informed that a spiritual direction client could see a mental health professional simultaneously if required; twenty-eight percent said that they were not informed, and twenty-eight percent report that it was non-applicable or had no recall. Such discussions do not arise in every session with every directee. If a directee demonstrates a need for such material or demonstrates signs and symptoms that require a referral for psychotherapy, the suggestion or recommendation may be made, often phrased in the form of a question: "Have you spoken to your family

physician about this,” or “Do you think that you may need to speak with someone about this?

Question 4, A – G

One hundred percent of the directees reported that the spiritual director helped them to: examine their lives in general, more closely; examine their faith traditions and their spiritual practices more closely; deepen their beliefs in their faith traditions and spiritual practices. These are some of the major goals and purposes of spiritual counseling or direction—to help people strengthen their belief and faith.

Fourteen percent said there was no help in examining their faith tradition and spiritual practice because it wasn’t needed; the other eighty-six percent responded affirmatively. As the majority of the directees claim that they examined their faith traditions more closely, it’s likely that that also helped them to deepen their belief and faith.

Forty-two percent were assisted in establishing a faith tradition; twenty-nine percent were not, and twenty-nine percent said it was non-applicable. One was not attending church, and began attending Unity services. Prior to the sessions, she didn’t want to attend any church services.

Forty-three percent added spiritual practices to their routines; forty-three percent did not, and fourteen percent report that it was non-applicable. Once the concept of spiritual practice was understood some realized that they did indeed have spiritual practices, and some added one or more to their routines.

Fifty-eight percent of the subjects said that they were helped to discover areas of their faith tradition and spiritual practices that they could explore more deeply, further

and more fully; twenty-eight percent did not have this experience, and the other fourteen percent did not answer the question. These included prayers, reading scriptures and saying grace before meals.

Note: - Question 5, A – D are addressed under “Directee Comments to Specific Questions.”

Question 6

Fifty-eight percent of the directees had heard of spiritual direction before they began the six-month project, and forty-two percent had not.

Question 7

One hundred percent said that the spiritual director explained the spiritual direction process to them.

Question 8

Only fourteen percent had expectations of the spiritual direction process; the other eighty-six percent did not.

Question 9, A – B

Fourteen percent of the subjects did not know what they wanted to talk about in the first session, but fifty-eight percent reported that they knew what they wanted to talk about in subsequent sessions. This indicates that they set their own agendas and goals without discussing them or that once they experienced the first few sessions, they got a better sense of what they could talk about.

Question 10, A- C

Twenty-eight percent of the subjects said they did set goals, and seventy-two percent had not. Eighty-six percent said their concerns and issues were addressed, and fourteen percent reported it was non-applicable. Eighty-six percent said that their goals were met. Here again, this indicates that they set goals for themselves after the first few sessions. Taking the initiative to set their own agendas and resolve their issues themselves indicate an attempt towards achieving balance in their personal and spiritual lives.

Question 11, A – C

One hundred percent of the volunteer directees report positive changes after six sessions of spiritual direction, and that they would attend sessions again if needed. This is a very good response for a practice that is fairly new to a number of people.

Fourteen percent reported that they would consider continuing spiritual direction sessions; forty-three percent said they would not for various reasons, such as they could not add the session time to schedules that were already full, or they don't feel the need at this time; fourteen percent are not sure, and twenty-nine percent did not respond to the question.

Question 12

One hundred percent of the subjects reported that the six monthly spiritual direction sessions were helpful to them. This is an excellent response. One hundred percent speaks for itself.

Question 13, A – F

The spiritual director's faith tradition (Islam) was different from eighty-six percent of the directees; one directee is also Muslim. Fourteen percent reported that the

difference in faith tradition matters; seventy-two percent, that it does not matter, and another fourteen percent that it was non-applicable. Overall, it did not matter to non-Muslims that the spiritual director is a Muslim. Only fourteen percent would not see another Muslim director. She indicated that she does not understand or particularly like the Muslims in the Nation of Islam, and she knows very little of Islam otherwise.

One hundred percent would seek, if available, the services of the (Muslim) spiritual director who conducted this demonstration project, and would also recommend her services as well.

Question 14, A- V

Out of twenty-two faith traditions, including Christian denominations, Buddhism is the only one from which one hundred percent of the directees would choose a spiritual director; eighty-six percent would choose a Muslim, a Taoist or a Unitarian Universalist; seventy-one percent would seek the services of an African Traditionalist, a Baha'i, a Catholic, a Protestant, and a Native American Traditionalist; fifty-eight percent would see someone who is a Spiritual Baptist or from another Christian denomination, a Hindu, Jain, Jew, Polytheist or a Sikh; forty-two percent would see an Agnostic, a Wiccan or a Zoroastrian; Seventy- two percent would not see an Atheist.

In varying degrees, directees would seek the services of a spiritual director who is a follower from a faith tradition that is different from her own. This indicates that society is moving in the direction of accepting religious diversity, and also interfaith and multifaith interaction. A majority indicated that they would not seek the services of a spiritual director who is Atheist. This response indicates, from this small sample of directees, that God is still central to most.

Directee Comments to Specific Questions

1B – Was your spiritual director attentive?

Yes, she would often repeat what I said or ask for clarification.

1E – Was your spiritual director non-judgmental?

Yes, I felt safe enough to share my stories about myself and my family.

2E – Did your spiritual director provide you a sense of being heard?

Sometimes I sensed a different spiritual lens that she was hearing, seeing me (a Buddhist) with (Note: - The directee admitted that she was seeing through a Judeo-Christian lens herself. She may have been projecting her own feelings to me).

2G – Did your spiritual director provide you a sense of drawing your own conclusions?

Yes, she helped me to find conclusions if I hadn't come to them myself.

2H – Did your spiritual director provide you a sense of finding your own solutions?

Yes, for the most part. Often, ideas would come to me after the session.

3A – Did your spiritual director reflect upon your expressed concerns, which provided you the opportunity to examine them more closely?

Yes, she helped me to gain clarity by getting some of my old ideas out of my head.

3B – Did your spiritual director help you to look for further clarity?

Yes, Ruqaiyah constantly challenged me by asking questions and digging deeply into my answers.

3D - Did your spiritual director present examples, scenarios and stories similar to your own to help you view them, subjectively and objectively?

Yes, the examples/scenarios helped me to realize that I wasn't the only one with my experiences.

3F – Did your spiritual director participate in discussion with you concerning the principles of your faith tradition on spiritual beliefs and practices (e.g., prayer, sacred texts, meditation...)?

Yes, with supportive sharing.

Yes, again, she helped me to see my “habits” (prayer and saying grace before meals) as spiritual practices.

3G – Did your spiritual director allow you to express your religious and spiritual beliefs without imposing her own?

Yes, although there were examples of hers and others.

4A – Did spiritual direction sessions help you examine your spiritual life more closely?

Somewhat--I think I was already looking quite closely.

Yes, as a result of the sessions, I find I am more open to my spiritual life.

4C – Did spiritual direction help you examine your faith tradition or spiritual practices and beliefs more closely.

Yes, with great enthusiasm.

Yes, I am even more comfortable now with my practices.

4D – Did spiritual direction sessions deepen your beliefs in your faith tradition or spiritual practices?

Yes, because I'm more accepting. I practice my faith and developed a deeper belief in God.

4E – Did spiritual direction sessions help you to establish a faith tradition or spiritual practice?

No—I already had some.

Yes, the sessions helped me to be more at ease with my spiritual practices.

4F - Did spiritual direction sessions result in your adding any rituals to your current spiritual practices?

Yes, attending church.

Yes, the sense of joy and peace after sessions encouraged me to want more and add more devotional practices.

5 – Following six months of once-per month spiritual direction sessions:

A - What was most helpful to you?

Ruqaiyah's ability to listen and ask questions helped me stay on track and clarify my thoughts.

Having someone to talk to who was objective.

The process of laying out my life issues for examination and the guidance of listing and reflecting back my words to me.

Having a place to openly discuss spiritual questions.

Our last (4th session) was most helpful as I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit with us.

I looked forward to each monthly session because I felt that some new awareness was to be opened at each.

B – What was least helpful to you?

Sometimes I felt Ruqaiyah didn't fully understand what I was saying because the way of approaching life's questions and problems through Buddhism is so unique and different from her spiritual paths (Note: - It is not clear what she means by "different from her spiritual paths." Perhaps it is an assumption that I know nothing of Buddhism. As a convert from Protestant Christianity to Buddhism she is still challenged by her practice; perhaps Buddhism is so unique to her).

Covering the technical requirements of our sessions.

Doing the sessions over the telephone made it difficult initially; although my sessions were limited to the telephone, they were welcome.

Questions about who's who in my family; I suppose it was necessary. Note:- She is talking about the profile section of the questionnaire).

The weeks between the sessions slowed the process down (Note: - Some people like to be seen twice per month or once per week).

C – What would you have liked more of?

More confrontation from Ruqaiyah when she heard my inconsistencies (Note: - The directee explained the more confrontational approach of the teacher in Zen Buddhism).

Perhaps more questions from the spiritual director (Note: - Some directees want more questions; some want less).

More than six months—more than six sessions).

I would have liked all six sessions because I began the project late; a prayer to begin the session, and a ritual to end it.

I really enjoyed the sessions over the telephone (and I had also had some face-to-face sessions). They were surprisingly comfortable.

D – What would you have liked less of?

Less of a sense that I had to explain Buddhist thought. Although it helped to clarify, I felt that it took too much from the session (Note: - It was the first session. Thereafter, she did most of the talking about how much she was working, doing her practice, moving her ego out of the way because she wasn't being recognized for her work, the need to cut down on her smoking and drinking and devoting her life to the center).

Explanation of my rights although I realize that it was necessary (Note: - She means telling her that the session is hers to discuss whatever she wishes to discuss. She thought that there had to be an agenda).

I don't say much, and I don't interrupt. My spiritual director sometimes filled in the blanks (silence) with talking (Note: - She means asking a question.

Telephone work with this directee posed a challenge. When she did speak, it was in a whisper. The solution given to me in supervision was to ask at some point: "What is happening for you in the silence?).

I would have liked less time between sessions.

9A – Did you know what you wanted to talk about or discuss before you began your first session?

No, topics sought of arose of their own accord.

9B – Did you know what you wanted to talk about or discuss in subsequent sessions?

Yes, usually.

10A- Did you set any goals regarding your concerns and issues, either on your own or with your spiritual director?

No, not at first, but as we went along, yes.

10B- Did you address your concerns and issues?

Yes, a few as they came up.

11A- Following your six monthly sessions, were there any positive changes or resolutions regarding your concerns and issues?

Yes, following a solo retreat that culminated in major changes.

11B- After a six-month “trial” of spiritual direction sessions once per month, would you continue attending sessions?

Maybe in the future.

13B- If applicable, did it matter that the spiritual director’s faith tradition is different from yours?

No, because her approach was non-judgmental.

Additional Comments

My spiritual director was so helpful in my development and evolution. I so appreciated all of her gifts of insight and wisdom.

My spiritual director was fully active, compassionate and quietly helpful.

I am grateful to my spiritual director and the One Spirit Spiritual Counseling program that made these sessions a wonderful opportunity for my growth.

I, again, am extremely grateful for this experience, and my spiritual director will always remain in my heart for the help that she offered.

Although phone sessions were not optimal, Ruqaiyah created space to explore questions and concerns.

I am most grateful to have the opportunity to participate in a program where I could examine my spiritual life and practice. Although I was initially hesitant about the sessions, Ruqaiyah was always willing to create a space for me, and to share her gifts so willingly.

Ruqaiyah's gifts of humor and spiritual discernment will be a blessing for many in years to come—happiness, love and peace.

Just as a repeat, the sessions opened me up to myself as well as to other spiritual practices and beliefs. They brought a new awareness of life for me. I'm glad to have participated in this project.

I found that I had one goal, which was to understand what spiritual direction is. I really enjoyed my time with my spiritual director. Her integrity and authenticity were astonishing.

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